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Revised Vulnerable and Marginalized Groups Plan
for the Batwa around the Mgahinga Gorilla National Park

UNDER THE PROJECT
Investing in Forests and Protected Areas for Climate Smart
Development
(IFPA-CD)
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Acronyms

BDO	Batwa Development Organisation
BIDO	Batwa Indigenous Development Organisation
BIEO	Batwa Indigenous Empowerment Organisation
BMCT	Bwindi Mgahinga Conservation Trust
CFM	Collaborative Forest Management
CFR	Central Forest Reserve
CRM	Collaborative Resource Management
CSO	Civil Society Organizations
DLG	District Local Government
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
ESF	Environmental and Social Framework
ESS	Environmental and Social Standard
ESMF	Environmental and Social Management Framework
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FPIC	Free, Prior, Informed Consent
GoU	Government of Uganda
IDA	International Development Association
KII	Key Informant Interview
MGNP	Mgahinga Gorilla National Park
MTWA	Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities
MWE	Ministry of Water and Environment
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NFA	National Forestry Authority
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NP	National Park
PA	Protected Area
PF	Process Framework
PROBICOU	Pro-biodiversity Conservationists in Uganda
PRIME	Productive Resources Investment for Managing the Environment
SI	Statutory Instrument
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
STAR	Sustainable Tourism in Albertine Rift
TSP	Technical Service Provider
UOBDU	United Organization for Batwa Development in Uganda
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
UWA	Uganda Wildlife Authority
VMGs	Vulnerable and Marginalized Groups
VMGF	Vulnerable and Marginalized Groups Framework
VMGP	Vulnerable and Marginalized Groups Plan
WB	World Bank

Introduction

The Government of Uganda (GoU) is implementing the “Investing in Forests and Protected Areas for Climate-Smart Development (IFPA-CD or Project) Project”. The Project is financed by the International Development Association (IDA) of the World Bank (with financing of US\$148.2 million equivalent) and GoU. The implementation of the project is led by the Ministry of Water and Environment (MWE), Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA), and the National Forestry Authority (NFA). As of August 1, 2025, the NFA has been mainstreamed into MWE. Therefore, throughout this document, all subsequent references to this entity will be noted as MWE/ex-NFA to accurately reflect this organizational change. The Project was approved in April 2020, became effective in August 2021, and closes on June 30, 2026.

The development objective of the Project is to (i) improve sustainable management of forests and protected areas in target landscapes; and (ii) increase benefits to communities from forests in target landscapes. Mgahinga Gorilla National Park (MGNP or Mgahinga), located in the Albertine region, is one of the protected areas under the project.

During project preparation, the MWE, jointly with UWA and ex-NFA, prepared and disclosed the Project specific [Vulnerable and Marginalized Groups Framework \(VMGF\)](#).¹ The VMGF was prepared to meet the requirements of the World Bank Environmental and Social Framework (ESF) under the Environmental and Social Standard 7 (ESS7) on Indigenous Peoples / Sub-Saharan African Historically Underserved Traditional Local Communities. The purpose of the VMGF is to guide the preparation and implementation of Project interventions where there is a presence of Vulnerable and Marginalized Groups (VMGs) in Project areas.

The VMGF provides guidance to the implementing agencies on addressing the needs of ***distinct, vulnerable, social and cultural groups*** which possess the following characteristics, as defined by ESS7: *(i) self-identification as members of a distinct cultural group; (ii) collective attachment to geographically distinct -habitats or ancestral territories; (iii) customary cultural, economic or social institutions that are separate from those of the rest of the society; and (iv) an indigenous language, often different from the official language of the country or region.* The Batwa people is a group that meets these criteria in the IFPA-CD Project area, described in detail in section 3.2 below.

The VMGF recognizes the importance of the rights and interests of the VMGs / the Batwa and calls for their effective engagement in the design and implementation of the Project activities in four of the Project’s protected areas, namely Echuya Central Forest Reserve (CFR), Mgahinga Gorilla, Bwindi Impenetrable and Semuliki National Parks, as the Batwa live adjacent to these four Protected Areas (PA). These PAs are shown on the map below.

¹ <https://ugandawildlife.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Vulnerable-and-Marginalized-Groups-Framework-VMGF-for-Uganda-IFPA-CD.pdf>

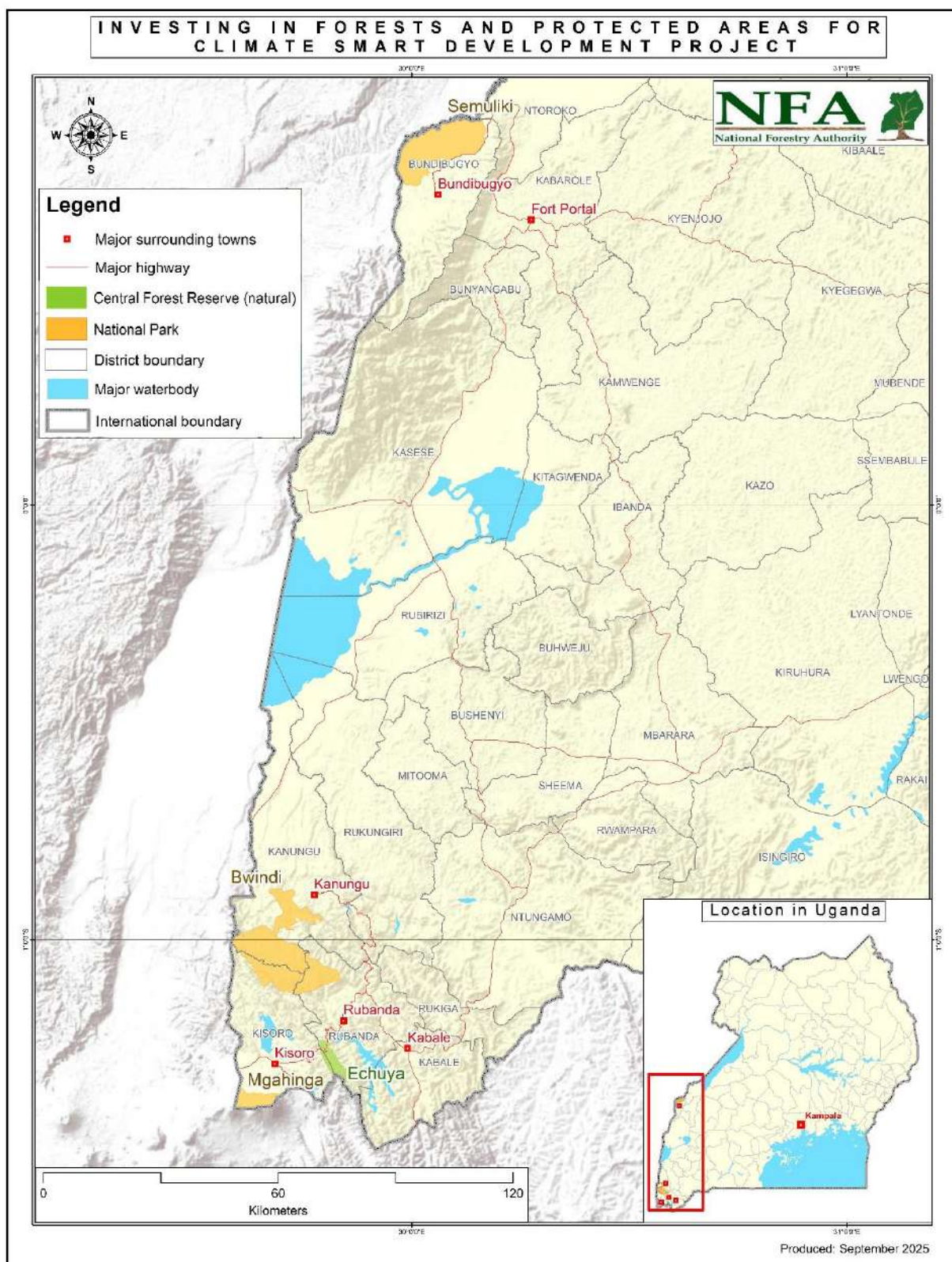


Figure 1. Map of four PAs with adjacent Batwa communities

The VMGF highlights the need to develop a separate Vulnerable and Marginalized Groups Plan (VMGP) for each of these project-targeted protected areas with a view to ensure that Batwa communities living around them participate in and equitably benefit from the project. **This is,**

therefore, the specific VMGP for the MGNP that has a population of less than 400 Batwa living nearby.

The VMGF and the four VMGPs developed under the Project draw on the use of existing participatory forest/resource management mechanisms used by UWA and MWE/ex-NFA for protected areas' adjacent communities, which are set out in the Uganda Wildlife Act (2019) and the National Forestry and Tree Planting Act (2003). For the purpose of this VMGP, the relevant participatory forest management arrangement is the **Collaborative Resources Management (CRM) model**, which is implemented in protected areas managed by UWA such as MGNP.

Collaborative Resources Management (CRM) - This is an arrangement of management in protected areas managed by UWA. It is based on the result of a negotiated process, whereby protected area management shares benefits, costs, decision-making authority and responsibilities, rights and roles in the management of wildlife resources with local communities living adjacent to such protected areas and other stakeholders. UWA started establishing CRMs in the 1990s with an objective of increasing support for conservation.

The CRM arrangement is based on the Uganda Wildlife Act 2019 and the related Community Resource Access Guidelines (Guidelines for the Management of Non-Timber Resource Access in Protected Areas by Neighbouring Communities) 2023. CRM (originally called *Multiple Use Programme*) was first introduced in Bwindi and Mgahinga in the early 1990s through written agreements of the communities with UWA's predecessor, the Uganda National Parks, in programs to implement collaborative management of plant (flora) resources, beekeeping and honey collection. The details of the current Collaborative Resources Management (CRM) groups and agreements are set out in Annex I *CRM Groups and Agreements in Mgahinga National Park*.

The above protected areas' co-management arrangements are also further described in the Process Framework (PF) developed to guide Project implementation. The PF outlines participatory processes for determining appropriate use restrictions and measures to address potential adverse impacts on livelihoods that may result from such restrictions. In addition to the VMGP and the PF, the Project has developed several other instruments to manage environmental and social risks in accordance with Uganda's laws and policies, as well as the World Bank Environmental and Social Framework (ESF). Notably, the Stakeholder Engagement Plan (SEP) ensures that information is disclosed in an inclusive, timely, and culturally appropriate manner, and that project-affected and interested parties -including the Batwa people- are meaningfully engaged. The SEP outlines specific strategies for engaging the Batwa that were considered during both the preparation and update of this VMGP. Furthermore, the SEP describes the Project Grievance Mechanism, which is also addressed in section 11 of this document.

The SEP builds on the key principles of stakeholder engagement outlined in the Stakeholder Engagement Framework, prepared during project preparation and disclosed in 2020.

The Environmental and Social Management Framework, prepared and disclosed in January 2020 and further updated in 2024 (and being updated again in 2025) identified key project impacts, proposed mitigation measures, outlined mechanisms for the screening of proposed project activities and identified potential environmental and social impacts and their subsequent management. The Labour Management Procedures were designed and disclosed in 2020 (and updated in 2024) to guide engagement and management of workers under the project.

1. Purpose and Scope of the VMGP

This VMGP sets out measures and actions agreed upon with the VMGs present in the Project areas, specifically, in this instance, the Batwa communities living around Mgahinga, to enable their effective participation in and benefit from the Project. The initial version of the VMGP was adopted and [disclosed in 2023](#),² based on two rounds of dedicated VMGP consultations with the Batwa communities in Mgahinga and NGOs and CSOs working with the Batwa communities undertaken in 2021 and 2022. This document represents the updated version of the VMGP for MGNP, which incorporates insights from recent consultations and lessons learnt during VMGP implementation. The measures described in this plan include specific responsibilities and timelines to ensure that its implementation can be monitored throughout the remainder of the Project, which is scheduled to close in June 2026.

2. Background and Rationale for the Update of the VMGP

Implementation of the VMGP was initiated in 2023. As implementation has advanced and implementation lessons started emerging, by late 2024 three Batwa-led CSOs communicated expectations for project support that differed from those agreed in the consultations undertaken as part of VMGP preparation (such as supporting land rights, including a Batwa representative on the Project Steering Committee, support to various infrastructure investments for the Batwa (like a cultural museum and a training center), transferring ownership of the Batwa trails to the Batwa, giving 10 percent of the project funds to the Indigenous Peoples, and so on). In response to such feedback, an update to the VMGP was considered and initiated in 2025. This updated VMGP for Mgahinga is informed by engagements during implementation of VMGP activities, additional engagements held in April 2025, consultations carried out in July 2025 and validations undertaken in December 2025. Each of these involved multiple meetings with Batwa communities, civil society organisations (CSO), including Batwa-led organisations, and local government representatives.

Details of consultation feedback for the revision of the Mgahinga VMGP can be found in Annex II.

3. Project Background

The IFPA-CD project has four components. Table 1 below sets out those Project activities under Components 1 (subcomponents 1.1., 1.2., and 1.3.) and 2 (subcomponent 2.1.) that have been or will be implemented in Mgahinga. There were no activities under the other subcomponents of Components 1 and 2, or under Components 3 and 4 that were implemented in Mgahinga and, as such, these are not relevant or included in Table 1 below. Component 4 finances project monitoring and management, including environmental and social management – preparation and revision of this VMGP is an activity under Component 4. A full description of all Project components and activities can be found in the publicly disclosed IFPA-CD Project Appraisal Document.³

It is important to note that project financing supplements ongoing activities funded by UWA and its partners in the target PAs, based on the priorities identified during project preparation. It aims to

² <https://ugandawildlife.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/UG-IFPA-CD-Project-P170466-Mgahinga-VMGP-March-2023.pdf>

³ See <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/304401587952865863>. See also modifications introduced by Project Restructuring <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/099111925105631444>.

improve ecological condition and tourism infrastructure of these PAs, using co-management approaches working with the communities, within the existing legal and regulatory framework.

Table 1. Project components and activities applicable to Mgahinga

Components/ sub-components	Activities
Component 1: Investments to improve the management of forest protected areas.	Focus on improving the management of government-owned forest and wildlife protected areas to ensure they can continue to generate revenues and provide important environmental services. Provide support to seven National Parks, three Wildlife Reserves, and 27 Central Forest Reserves (CFRs). Implementation led by the MWE (ex-NFA) and UWA.
	Summary of activities: Improve management of high biodiversity values of forests and for generating jobs and revenues that can help sustain their conservation and increase benefits to local communities.
Sub-component 1.1: Improvement of infrastructure and equipment for the management of forest protected areas	Activities in Mgahinga, implemented by UWA
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvement of UWA staff housing (senior and junior ranger posts) – planned • Investment in logistics and communication equipment (vehicle, motorcycles, binoculars) – completed
Sub-component 1.2: Increasing the involvement of local communities in the management of forest and wildlife areas by increasing their access and benefits from these areas.	Activities in Mgahinga, implemented by UWA
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community-oriented Human-wildlife conflict prevention infrastructure (reconstruction of the Buffalo Stone Wall, using local community labor, including Batwa laborers) – completed • Support for the establishment of collaborative resource management agreements under UWA – ongoing • Livelihood support activities (e.g., training on weaving baskets and mats, wood carving, making bee wax candles & jelly, perfumes, shoe polish, mushroom and vegetable growing; provision of water tanks and construction of water sheds and fuel-efficient cook stoves) – ongoing • Community awareness activities – ongoing • Roll-out of the Earth Ranger monitoring system – planned
Sub-component 1.3: Restoration of degraded natural forests and habitats within Protected Areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investments in fire detection and management (fire detection and fighting equipment and facilities; personal fire protective equipment) – completed • Eradication of invasive vegetation species and monitoring of removal – ongoing
Component 2: Investments to increase revenues and jobs from forests and wildlife protected areas	
Increase revenues and jobs from these forest and wildlife protected areas through targeted investments in tourism and productive forestry	

Summary of activities: Increase the economic contribution of forests through boosting revenue generation and job creation and strengthen incentives for improved forest management. Investment in tourism infrastructure to achieve continued development of nature-based tourism, and in addition, investments to increase forest industry-based jobs and incomes.

Subcomponent Investments in tourism	Activities in Mgahinga, implemented by UWA (ongoing)
	2.1: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construction of entrance gate structure and associated facilities (improved gate structure, toilet and office block) • Develop a camping site and rest area shelters along hiking trail • Develop a 3-peak volcano hiking trail • Construction of ladders and board walks (part of the hiking trail)

4. Relevant Baseline Conditions

4.1. Description of the MGNP

MGNP is located in the extreme south-western corner of Uganda between latitude -1.33 to -1.38 South and longitude 29.6° to 29.7° East. The area was originally established as a Forest Reserve. A Sanctuary to protect gorillas was established by Legal Notice 21 of 1930, the area being upgraded to Game Reserve Status by Statutory Instrument (SI) No. 216 of 1964 (substituted by SI No. 136 of 1965). The National Park was established by SI No. 27 of 1991, amended by SI No. 3 of 1992. At 33.7 km², MGNP is Uganda's smallest national park. By the late 1980s the area was severely encroached. After the area was upgraded to a National Park in 1991 the encroaching families were relocated.

MGNP is home to the Nyakagezi group of the rare Mountain Gorilla. It shares its gorilla population and is contiguous with the adjoining Parc National des Virunga (240 km²) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Parc National des Volcans (160 km²) in Rwanda, all forming the proposed transboundary protected area known as the Virunga Conservation Area, covering an area of 434 km². The area also has a significant large mammal population, including elephants, buffaloes, and giant forest hog. This is the only Park in Uganda in which the rare golden monkey is found. The park includes three of the Virunga volcanoes - Mt Muhabura (4,127 m), Mt Gahinga (3,474 m) from which the park derives its name, and Mt. Sabyinyo (3,645 m). It lies in Bufumbira county, Nyarusiza and Muramba sub-counties and is adjacent to the three parishes of Gisozi, Rukongi and Gitenderi.

MGNP is managed according to the General Management Plan; current plan is dated 2014-2024 (extended to 2025); the new plan for the period starting in 2026 is currently under validation. The park is zoned into four zones: the tourism zone, wilderness zone (strict conservation zone), administration zone, and the resource use zone / collaborative management zone (where community members are allowed access under permission from UWA, as per below).

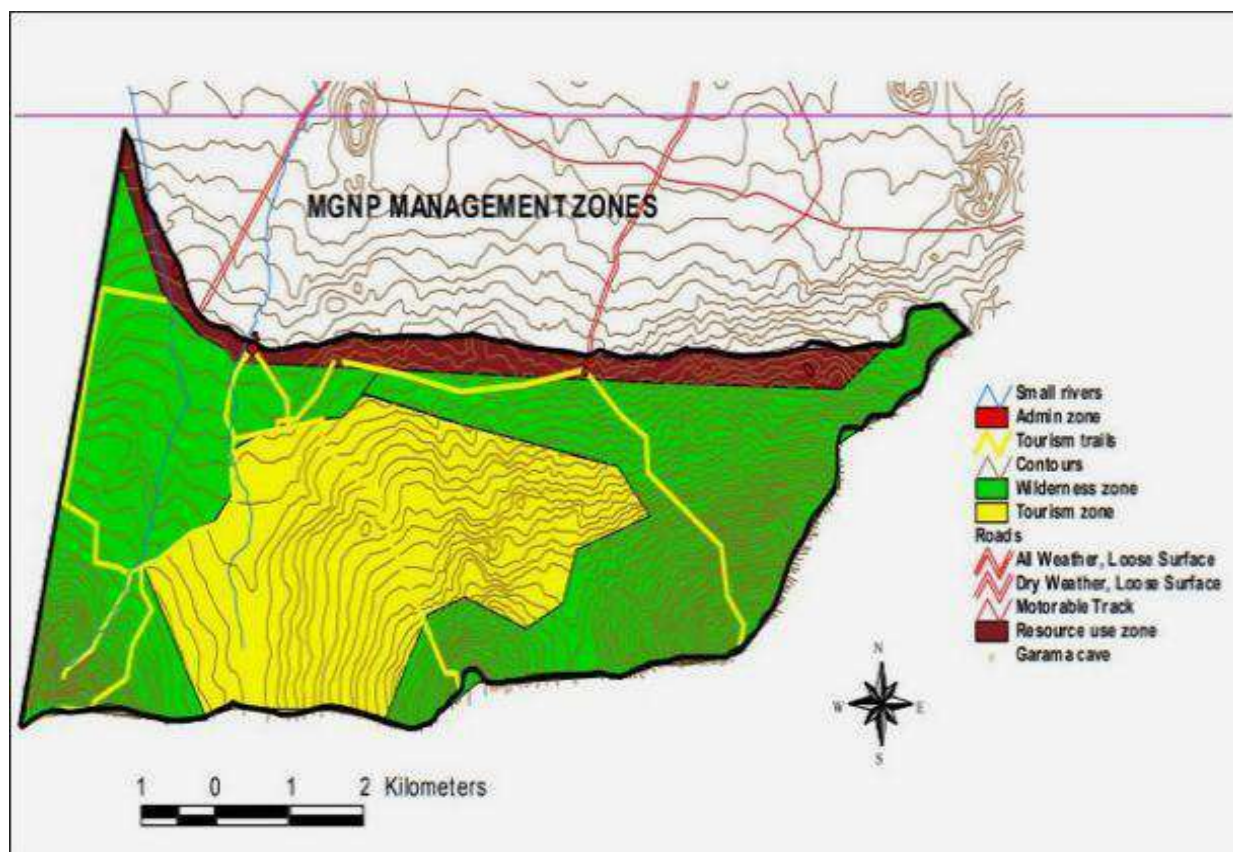


Figure 2. Map of MGNP with Zoning

4.2. The Batwa around MGNP

The Batwa are the forest's 'first people,' and their ancient knowledge of its secrets remains unrivalled. The creation of Bwindi Mgahinga Conservation Area (BMCA) (that encompasses MGNP and the Bwindi Impenetrable National Park) in 1991 required the Batwa to be definitively removed from their homes in the mountains and be displaced in a modern world unfamiliar to them, although their displacement started already in the 1930s with the initial gazettement of these protected areas.⁴ The Batwa ended up informally occupying a nearby farmland. This all took place well before the IFPA-CD project started. Portions of land were acquired for some Batwa communities under NGO or government projects in the last two decades near Mgahinga. The Batwa that live around MGNP are currently settled in Gahinga Batwa Village, Rukyeri Batwa Community and Rugongi Batwa community, in Kisoro district.

As of 2024, the Uganda Bureau of Statistics estimates that there are approximately 3,857 Batwa people in Uganda, comprising less than 0.01% of the country's population.

⁴ Batwa groups are pursuing the matters related to that historical relocation in the Ugandan High Court (United Organisation for Batwa Development in Uganda and 11 Others v Attorney General and 2 Others (Constitutional Petition No 3 of 2013) 2021 UGCC 25 (19 August 2021).

National census data from 2014 indicated a total of 6,200 Batwa in Uganda, which decreased by 38% to 3,857 in the 2024 census. These variations in population estimates suggest that available data on Batwa populations in Uganda is of limited reliability.

According to the Batwa Population Census by Bwindi Mgahinga Conservation Trust (BMCT), carried out in 2016, there are a total of 413 Households of Batwa people in Kisoro District, with a total population of 1,880 people. Of these 908 are Males, while 972 are females. The average household size among the Batwa is 5 people and 68.8% of the Batwa are below 25 years.

Table 2. Population of Batwa in Kisoro (2016)

District	Number of Households	Males	Females	Total
Kisoro	413	908	972	1,880

It is estimated that out of these, currently about 362 Batwa reside in settlements adjacent to Mgahinga in about 80 households.

Table 3. Estimates of Batwa population around Mgahinga (2022)

**Population estimates are based on the field work undertaken during preparation of original VMGPs*

Settlement	Parish	Subcounty	Households	Total population
Gahinga	Nyagakyenkye (Nyakacence)	Muramba	35	128
Rukyeri (Rukeri)	Gitenderi	Nyarusiza	40	201
Rugongi	Gitenderi	Nyarusiza	5	33
Total			80	362

With limited education among the Batwa, adapting to the modern world has been difficult. The Batwa earn their living through occasional labor or begging. They have few resources and limited land and suffer from acute poverty, malnutrition, and poor health. They derive some of their livelihood through engagement in CRM arrangements, working as guides in Batwa trails, as well as through involvement and benefit from UWA revenue sharing. This revenue sharing scheme and the Batwa trail (which are unrelated to the IFPA-CD Project) are briefly explained later in this section.

Local social organizations, beliefs, ancestral territory, and resource use patterns

Notwithstanding the numerous problems faced by Batwa, they continue to value their forest-based social system, culture, and traditional practices as an important part of their self-identification. The Batwa consider themselves one group with the same history, culture and contemporary socio-economic challenges. The traditional practices which define their ethnic group as a forest people include hunting and gathering forest resources, eating uncooked food, worshipping gods in the forest, sleeping in caves, dressing in leaves and animal skins, making fire using dry sticks and speaking the Rutwa language, though the number of fluent speakers is reducing over time.

The cultural values identified from the consultations in 2022⁵ show that Batwa people living around MGNP deeply value Mgahinga as their cultural heritage. They attach considerable cultural importance to forest resources including caves, hot springs, rivers, hills, plants, and animals. To the Batwa, the forests are a source of physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Before the forests were gazetted as national parks in the 1990s, Batwa depended on forest resources for food, medicine, basketry, firewood, marketable items, house construction, tools, rituals, hunting and recreation. Cultural songs, dances, household implements and tools, local names of people, places, water points, caves, gullies, streams, and hills within the park all reflect a long history of human involvement. Indeed, from this consultation and others before, the Batwa frequently referenced the importance of accessing the forest, including to access their cultural sites and items to save their culture from extinction and for improving their wellbeing. The Batwa continue to date to have access to these cultural sites inside Mgahinga under arrangements with UWA, as set out in the General Management Plan of Mgahinga.

In the same 2022 consultation with the Batwa, and through a review of literature and the General Management Plan for MGNP, a number of culturally significant items were identified and their importance in resource conservation discussed.⁶ The summary of items of cultural significance within Mgahinga are highlighted in the table below:

Table 4. Key plant and animal items and their cultural significance

	Valued item	Cultural significance
1	Honey from stingless bees and honey- bees	Important in preparing the beer used in offerings and sacrifices to appease the spirits of their ancestors
2	Animals, including duikers, bushbucks, buffaloes, bush pigs, flying squirrels, cane rats, francolins and mudfish	Meat was a staple food for Batwa and was also used in worship. Animal skins were used as clothes and storage bags. Flying squirrels were used as dowry.
3	Plants, including wild yams, mushrooms, fruits like <i>Myrianthus</i> sp. and vegetables like <i>Solanum nigrum</i>	Important food items
4	<i>Rytigynia kigeziensis</i> , <i>Piper guinensis</i> , <i>Ocotea usambarensis</i> , <i>Toddalia</i> sp. and <i>Prunus Africana</i>	Important medicinal plants
5	<i>Ficus</i> sp. and <i>Erythrina abyssinica</i>	Important in acts of worship

Due to high population pressure, there is inadequate availability of these resources outside the park, and this has increased the demand and pressure on park resources, which is a major reason for regularized access to PA resources. Where resources are in high demand by different communities or

⁵ Consultative meeting held with the Batwa in Mgahinga Gorilla National Park Headquarters on September 24th, 2022, after COVID-19 restrictions were lifted. The meeting was attended by 67 in total (30 men and 37 women), with representation of Batwa from the park-adjacent communities around MGNP. The goal of consulting the Batwa who reside around MGNP was to learn about their concerns and preferences regarding the design and proposed implementation of the IFPA-CD project to give them equitable access to project benefits.

⁶ For an inventory from a previous UWA project in 2013 see: <https://www.iapad.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Batwa-cultural-values-report.pdf>

at risk of overexploitation, regulations and co-management mechanisms are needed to prevent exclusion, conflict and degradation, which could negatively affect both the ecosystem and the surrounding protected area's local population. This also explains the need to promote the increased participation of MGNP adjacent communities in CRM arrangements, including among the Batwa. The CRM program implemented by UWA has developed and strengthened park adjacent community institutions and provided real benefits to the CRM resource users. However, some Batwa have expressed that they feel marginalized by the Bafumbira (the dominant ethnic group around Mgahinga) in the existing CRMs and say this has resulted in limited participation in the CRM program. This could be the case as the Batwa people, as with most small hunter-gatherer communities, are viewed as inferior by neighbouring majority groups who are mostly agrarian, have more resources, and political and social standing.

As part of the efforts to address those concerns, some initiatives have been developed to specifically target the Batwa and facilitate their participation in and benefit through CRM arrangements in Mgahinga.⁷ For example, a Batwa-only MoU on the Batwa cultural trail is in the process of renewal (this is outside of the scope of the IFPA-Project). The MGNP Management Plan currently in place also recognizes specific circumstances and access needs for the Batwa and as seen below, the IFPA-CD Project has supported negotiation of a Batwa-only beekeeping MoU and provided Batwa communities with alternative livelihoods and income generation support to reduce exclusion and reliance on forest access.

Despite reported challenges, UWA has reported Batwa participation in CRM groups and ensuing livelihoods training and benefits to the Batwa, including, for example, training in energy-saving stoves, rainwater harvesting, and woodlot establishment, with Batwa participation in several initiatives by mid-2025. Batwa involvement in tourism, portering, and medicinal plant inventory has been ongoing, but the need for continuous training, expanded portering, and improved access to materials for weaving was noted during the 2025 consultations (see also section 5.3 below).

The Batwa Cultural Trail

In June 2011, UWA, Kisoro District Local Government and the United Organisation for Batwa Development in Uganda (UOBDU) launched the Batwa Cultural Trail. The launch was marked by the signing of a MoU between the three parties stipulating the roles and responsibilities of each. The Batwa trail is a Batwa led tourism venture. The trail serves as an educational tool for tourists, as well as a source of employment and income for the Batwa. Establishment of the trail was supported by the International Gorilla Conservation Program (IGCP), the Greater Virunga Transboundary Collaboration, USAID/ Sustainable Tourism in Albertine Rift (STAR), and the Royal Netherlands embassy, among others.

In response to research conducted on Uganda National Parks in 2002, which highlighted the Batwa community's challenges related to landlessness, unemployment, and the lack of sustainable livelihoods -factors that contributed to their reliance on resources within MGNP-the IGCP and UOBDU, with support from USAID Productive Resources Investment for Managing the Environment in Western Uganda (PRIME/West), starting developing a product that would offer an alternative source of

⁷ UWA has reported the adoption of several measures across MGNP, BINP and SNP to improve the Batwa inclusion in the CRMs and strengthen relations with neighboring communities, including: (i) recognition of Batwa-specific cultural and traditional resource knowledge that is integrating traditional knowledge in conservation; (ii) alternative livelihoods and income generation support to reduce exclusion and reliance on forest access; and (iii) inclusion in institutional and benefit sharing mechanisms such as revenue sharing (the latter outside the scope of the IFPA-CD Project).

livelihood to the Batwa, and a consultant was hired in 2006 to formulate a tourism plan aimed at providing new livelihood opportunities for the community.

Accordingly, from 2006, studies were carried out and recordings made of the Batwa traditional way of life as well as a study on the economic and social impact of the planned product. In 2007, the process of developing the product began in reality, with the training of the Batwa guides, putting in place the necessary infrastructure. In 2009, the Batwa Trail project received a boost from Greater Virunga Transboundary Collaboration with funding from the Royal Netherlands embassy to complete the product, but it remained not marketed. In 2010, the Tourism Management Committee sought assistance from USAID-STAR program to begin marketing this unique product. The main objectives of the Batwa Trail are to create an avenue where Batwa can earn an income for livelihood, preserving the rich Batwa culture as well as the traditional relationship between the Batwa and the forest and to diversify tourism activities besides the renowned gorilla trekking. Fifty percent of the revenue generated from this product is income for UWA, and the other 50% is split between Batwa participants, the tour and guides and dancers, and the fund (managed by UWA for the benefit of the Batwa) that supports their community and conservation projects.

In April 2019, UWA purchased, with proceeds from this fund, two pieces of land measuring 7.5 acres worth UGX180 Million for a group of 35 people of the Batwa community neighboring MGNP. One piece of land is situated in Musana, while the other is situated in Nyagacence, both in Kisoro District.

UWA in collaboration with the Bwindi Mgahinga Conservation Trust (BMCT) constructed a tourism Centre at Rwerere with specific targeted support to Batwa to use the Centre to display their culturally-based tourism potential. The Batwa were targeted to benefit from this facility and tourism overall through capacity building, product diversification and strengthening group dynamics. BMCT has financed tourism and marketing facilities such as Rwerere Centre and continues to support diversification and quality of tourist products.

The Batwa trail and the tourism Centre at Rwerere were important initiatives supported by other partners, as detailed above. They took place prior to the IPFA-CD Project and are not supported as part of it, as per project design, as they are developed by UWA and its partners using different programs and funding sources. While the trail has generated income, communication about the share allotted to Batwa communities could be improved, as there has been a perceived lack of transparency in this regard – though UWA has resolved to take steps to overcome this through improved communication with Batwa communities.

UWA's Tourism Revenue Sharing Scheme

In order to support its community conservation objectives and secure more support from the local communities, UWA has a long-standing revenue-sharing scheme, based on the legal provisions within the Uganda Wildlife Act (2019) (and its predecessor Wildlife Act Cap 200).⁸ Under this scheme, 20 percent of all gate fee proceeds and a portion of the revenue from gorilla trekking permits are remitted for implementation of community investments in the sub-counties adjacent to the boundaries of the protected areas. Implementation of such community proposed investments is done through the district local government; while the communities select which investments the Community Project Management Committee will submit for funding. The amount of money shared with the communities

⁸ UWA's **Uganda Revenue Sharing Guidelines (2013)** describe the overall goal of revenue sharing which is “to ensure strong partnership between protected area management, local communities and local governments, leading to sustainable management of resources in and around protected areas by enabling people living adjacent to protected areas to obtain financial benefits derived from the existence of these areas that contribute to improvements in their welfare and help gain their support for protected areas conservation”

varies depending on the number of tourists who visit the Park and track the gorillas. Revenue sharing funds may be allocated to household and community initiatives that fulfill two main criteria: they must help to reduce human-wildlife conflict or contribute to enhance the livelihoods of households residing in park-adjacent villages. Examples of community projects supported through the UWA Revenue Sharing Scheme include the construction of local health clinics, schools, and similar facilities. At the household level, the program has funded initiatives such as goat rearing, piggeries, tree planting, bee keeping, and Irish potato growing.

The UWA Tourism Revenue Sharing Scheme is the mainstream scheme under national law, established over a decade prior to the project, is operated by UWA under the national law, and was not developed or implemented with the support of IFPA-CD, nor is it used for implementation of any Project activities.

4.3 Collaborative park management and community benefit sharing

Collaborative Resource Management (CRM)

As explained earlier in this document, MGNP is zoned into four zones: the tourism zone, wilderness zone (strict conservation zone), administration zone, and the resource use zone / collaborative management zone, which is where community members are allowed access under permission from UWA. In this **collaborative management zone**, the management priority is to conserve this park values through an integrated approach encompassing protection, education, restoration and community conservation approaches. Collaborative resource management in this zone is organized through specific user groups and formal agreements.

CRM groups consist of the organized community resource-user groups (informal associations) that represent local stakeholders living adjacent to wildlife protected areas, including national parks. CRM agreements, for their part, are the formal, negotiated instruments (typically a MoU) between UWA and those groups, which define the scope of resource access, roles, responsibilities, decision-making, benefit sharing, monitoring, and compliance. The agreements establish the rights and obligations under which the CRM group operates; and the groups implement and monitor the agreed activities in collaboration with UWA, which oversees and enforces the terms. All CRM groups have a governance body elected by the resource users themselves, namely a Resource Use Executive Committee of around 9 members. This Committee functions include participating in the assessment of resource use conditions and in the drafting of MoUs, management of resource access activities, monitoring of resource sites, assessing impact of resource access on PA and reporting non-compliance and illegal activities (as defined in the 2023 UWA Resource Use Guidelines and MoU's provisions).

Regulated harvesting of biophysical non-timber resources in a sustainable manner by community residents is therefore allowed in agreed resource-use areas mainly through negotiated collaborative management agreements. The 2023 UWA Resource Use Guidelines also permit access outside of CRM, on a case-by-case basis, based on specific requests co-signed by the Local Council (LC1) Chairperson. Collaborative management agreements clearly define the resources to be used, the resource user community for each agreement, and the agreed resource-use area for that community, together with the agreed control and monitoring mechanisms. The collaborative management zone is confined within 1km distance from the park boundary where there are no tourism activities.

Permitted Activities within the collaborative management zone in Mgahinga include:

- Resource harvesting where appropriate as per collaborative management agreements
- Research, monitoring, and Park operations
- Accompanied visitor use
- Visitor information and interpretative services
- Fire management activities
- Small scale Garbage disposal sites for garbage originating from works permitted in the zone

Currently, the resources being accessed in the collaborative management zone of the park include bamboo rhizomes, medicinal plants, weaving materials, vines for craft material and access to areas for bee keeping in the park.

CRM arrangements for resource access and use in Mgahinga

In addition to Mgahinga General Management Plan (2014-2024-extended to 2025), existing collaborative resource management arrangements in Mgahinga are governed by the Uganda Wildlife Act (2019) and UWA Guidelines for the Management of Non-Timber Resource Access in Protected Areas by Neighbouring Communities (2023). The CRM model arising from this regulatory framework is implemented through CRM groups and agreements (MoUs). The MoUs provide for collaborative use and management of the non-timber park resources and streamline the roles and responsibilities of a community conservation group, on one hand, and the roles of UWA on the other hand, and allow access by park adjacent communities to multiple use zones within the park and/or areas for beekeeping activities. The MoUs provide for successful CRM in the park. The community members accessing the park are accompanied by the UWA staff, for their safety and security.

Currently (at the time of revision of this VMGP) there are four MoUs that allow for regulated and sustainable resource access/use in the park collaborative management zone (see also Annex I). There is also one additional MoU under negotiation for all the Batwa (Batwa only CRM) in the Nyakancece community to be able to place beehives within the Mgahinga national park along the boundary, which is likely to benefit approximately 60 Batwa. The four existing resource access/use MoUs have 30 Batwa members in total.⁹ Currently, 7 Batwas are members of the Resource Use Executive Committees established by the resource access/use CRM groups under agreements existing in Mgahinga.

As further noted in sections 3.2 and 4 below, the Project has worked to increase the participation of Batwa community members in CRMs in Mgahinga, including through the renewal of expired MoUs and the signing of new agreements as well as by carrying out awareness raising activities.

5. Status of VMGP Implementation (pre-revision of 2025)

The IFPA-CD Project has supported the preparation of a MoU for beekeeping and a medicinal plants demonstration plot in Nyakancece community (Kisoro district) for the Batwa members in this community (approximately 45-60 persons), which is currently under negotiation. The Project has also supported the targeted training of 50 Batwa community members in Mgahinga on identification and management of livelihood improvement projects (i.e., weaving baskets and mats, wood carving, making bee wax candles & jelly, perfumes, shoe polish, mushroom and vegetable growing). Similar

⁹ In addition, there are two MoUs related to tourism that are not Project related. One is a MoU specific to the so called Batwa Cultural Trail, which is under a renewal process but being implemented *de facto*. The other one is a MoU specific to porters in Bwindi-Mgahinga Conservation Area, thus covering the two parks. These two MoUs predate the Project and are not supported under any of its activities.

activities have been undertaken in other national parks where the Batwa live close by, as seen in the VMGPs developed for the other targeted PAs.

As part of the VMGP revision process that concluded in 2025, UWA compiled and discussed with stakeholders a consolidated view of VMGP implementation to date. The table below summarizes progress against planned outputs as well as actions and outcomes achieved. It reflects what had been completed or was in progress prior to the VMGP update and served as the evidence base presented to stakeholders during consultations in July 2025.

Table 5. Status of VMGP implementation in MGNP as of early July 2025

Output and Targets¹⁰	Interventions
Conduct training and strengthen the management of CRM groups in MGNP to effectively include Batwa participation through issue specific capacity building and training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 50 Batwas were organized and trained on community entrepreneurship, financial management and other relevant skills aligned to selected tourism, environment and natural resources-based enterprises. • 2 new MoUs were signed in two Subcounties bordering the park in 2025 with project support. There are also 2 MoUs with beekeepers' groups, in place since 2021, which are due for renewal – renewal is also being supported with project funds. • Batwa community members have been employed under the Project activities, as detailed below.
Create partnerships with the Batwa on control and removal of invasive species	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over 21 Batwa community members have been involved in manual invasive removal and stone wall construction sub projects
With the help of Batwa members, establish a medicinal demonstration plot around MGNP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inventory of herbal medicine used by the Batwa was undertaken in MGNP. The activity still continues using Earth Ranger to geo-reference herbal plants used by the Batwa community as well as taking original plant photographs for ease of identification. The herbal booklets so far produced under Batwa leadership and for their exclusive use will be translated into local languages including Rutwa and Rufumbira (the language more routinely used by the Batwa living around Mgahinga).

¹⁰ As per the original VMGP.

Conduct project awareness-raising campaigns to local Batwa communities on the importance of sustainable wildlife management.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The participation of the Batwa in undertaking inventory of herbal medicine created an opportunity for the Batwa to further enable sustainable use and equitable benefit-sharing of wildlife resources • Awareness meetings have been carried out (20 sessions among Batwa communities living adjacent to UWA PAs). Topics discussed include the role of stakeholders in natural resource management, impacts of protected areas in the lives of the surrounding communities, existing laws and policies for the protection of wildlife.
Targeted training to develop Batwa skills to actively participate in and benefit from the management of forest and wildlife resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 50 Batwa were organized and trained on identification and management of livelihood improvement projects (weaving baskets and mats, wood carving, making bee wax candles & jelly, perfumes, shoe polish, mushroom and vegetable growing)
Support and training on rainwater harvesting.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Batwa community have been supported with one 5000lt rainwater harvesting tanks to address water shortage in Rukongi - Mgahinga • Construction of two water sheds for the Batwa is ongoing • Twenty (3000ltr) water tanks have been given to CRM groups and Batwa are among them

As explained in the section below, the targets and actions planned and implemented thus far -as described in the table above- were informed by the consultations conducted in 2021 and 2022 for developing the initial VMGP for Mgahinga. The stock taking on implementation progress, achievements and challenges helped identify measures requiring continuation, adjustments and additional actions to be included in this updated VMGP, as further discussed in section 6.3.3 and 7 below.

6. Development and Consultation Process of the VMGP

The development of the VGMP followed the earlier adoption of a VMGF, which was prepared in consultation with target communities previously engaged during Uganda's REDD+ Program. During the VMGF consultations, Batwa communities as well as CSOs and NGOs (both Batwa-led and non-Batwa led) identified several key issues, including:

- The need to ensure Batwa communities and their leaders are fully included in planning, selection, design, and implementation of IFPA-CD activities.
- Strengthening collaborative resource management with UWA and investing in Batwa groups through training in crafts, beekeeping, and confidence-building.
- Ensuring coordinated, culturally sensitive interventions that support Batwa traditions while meeting conservation and development goals.
- Integrating Batwa cultural values into Protected Area management and linking this to education and employment rooted in indigenous knowledge.
- Promoting gender-balanced job opportunities such as guides, porters, and boundary management.

After completion and adoption of the VMGF in 2020, the preparation of the VMGP specifically for Batwa communities around the MGNP began in 2021. Community consultations were held in 2021 and 2022 (with significant delays as a result of restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic), with the VMGP adopted and disclosed in March 2023. The VMGP documented the feedback received from the Batwa living adjacent to Mgahinga and the specific actions that had been identified and agreed with them for inclusion under the IFPA-CD Project, as well as measures for avoiding, minimizing or mitigating for potential negative social economic impacts on them, if any. This includes appropriate ways of engaging Batwa communities to benefit from the project, in line with ESS7. The measures are described in this plan, which also specifies the responsibilities and timelines to ensure that implementation can be monitored throughout the project lifetime. The VMGP is aligned with strategies and actions prioritized in the MGNP Management Plan 2014-2024 (extended to 2025), which seeks to recognize the socio-economic and cultural rights of the indigenous Batwa in collaboration with other partners.

The VMGP has been developed and revised through inclusive participation of Batwa communities adjacent to Mgahinga and relevant local stakeholders, including Kisoro District Local Government, as well as NGOs and CSOs that are led by Batwa or work on Batwa issues and/or MGNP conservation. Each new consultation carried out built on the earlier efforts, beginning with feedback on the project's progress and previous outcomes. Key VMGF and VMGP aspects have been revisited, and participants reminded of earlier discussions.

The main phases of consultation that have informed the VMGP for Mgahinga, along with their respective methodologies, are summarized below. Annex III provides a summary table of all stakeholders consulted for the development and revision of the Mgahinga VMGP.

6.1. Phase I of Consultations (June 2021)

Initial consultations with Batwa leaders were held in June 2021 during Uganda's COVID-19 lockdown, following strict SOPs. Methods included Key Informant Interviews, small Focus Group Discussions (no more than five people), and limited virtual or telephone interviews. Discussions were conducted in Rukiga and Kifumbira/Kinyarwanda languages, familiar to both Batwa communities and the VMGP team, and held outdoors to ensure safety.

Meetings on June 18, 2021, at MGNP Headquarters involved 16 participants from the Batwa and resulted in a draft VMGP. However, participation was limited due to COVID-19 restrictions and the unsuitability of remote methods, as few Batwa had phones. Only a small number of selected Batwa members were consulted. It was therefore necessary to conduct further discussions to reach more Batwa, include wider stakeholders, and gather site-specific baseline data.

6.2. Phase II of Consultations (September 2022)

After COVID-19 restrictions were lifted, a second round of consultations was held on September 24 and 25, 2022, at MGNP Headquarters and at Baram Hotel, Kisoro, respectively. In total, 89 people were engaged in this round of consultations (44 men, 45 women) including park adjacent Batwa communities, NGOs/CSOs and relevant authorities. The meeting aimed to gather stakeholders' concerns and preferences on IFPA-CD project design and implementation to ensure Batwas' participation and equitable access to Project benefits. The VMGP consultation was developed in line with Chapter Six of the Vulnerable and Marginalized Groups Framework (VMGF) and the SEP for

the IFPA-CD Project. These consultations also served to validate the draft VMGP prepared based on phase I of consultations.

Consultations with Batwa Communities. 67 people (30 men, 37 women) from Batwa communities living around MGNP attended the consultation of September 24, 2022. Participants prioritized and ranked project issues through an issue-identification exercise based on previous reports. The meeting, held in Rukiga, Kinyarwanda, and Orutwa, clarified project objectives and arrangements to encourage full participation. Prior communication was made by telephone through NGO representatives to share objectives, venue, and expected outcomes. Physical meetings followed a set agenda. Through the consultation process, participants identified several challenges and proposals related to participation and benefit from MGNP management. These insights have informed the VMGP and its implementation in a manner consistent with the Project scope, objectives and lifecycle.

Some of the key challenges identified by Batwa community members at the September 2022 consultations included:

- **Legacy and historical issues** such as land scarcity, the expectation to secure additional land for Batwa communities; lack of studies on Batwa resettlement; and issues of social ties such as migration between Kisoro and Rwanda
- **Inequalities in access to benefits** from development interventions, particularly for women, youth and Batwa people, including with respect to the existing UWA revenue sharing.
- **Issues affecting sustainable livelihoods**, such as the lack of formal organization among Batwa communities in Mgahinga; livelihood fragility, insufficient craft-making skills, limited capacity of Village Savings and Loan Associations and problem animals, especially buffalos, which destroy Mgahinga boundary walls and nearby crops; the need to allow youth participate in guiding and transfer of knowledge from the elders to ensure continuity.

Batwa communities also provided their feedback on the activities that could be included under IFPA-CD. As recorded in the original VMGP for Mgahinga, their proposals included:

- Collaborate with district authorities and NGOs to promote domestication of park resources such as bamboo and medicinal plants on community farms.
- Train Batwa in bamboo propagation and management.
- Increase community awareness on MoUs between Associations and UWA to ensure understanding of resource-use terms.
- Under the CRM, allow and regulate Batwa access to cultural sites and forest resources through separate MoUs, distinct from those of the Bafumbira, to apply customary management of sites and sustainable harvesting of wild honey and yams
- Train and equip Batwa in modern honey harvesting to reduce fire risks.
- Involve resource-use committees in monitoring offtake to prevent illegal harvesting and build community ownership.
- Use participatory approaches in developing and evaluating resource-use monitoring tools.
- Work with district government to promote rainwater harvesting.
- Develop Batwa-based tourism products to diversify MGNP's attractions and improve Batwa incomes through guiding, crafts, and cultural performances, while ensuring protection of Batwa culture through their participation in tourism planning.

Consultations with CSOs and authorities. A consultation meeting was held on 25 September 2022 at Baram Hotel, Kisoro. This was attended by 22 participants (14 men, 8 women) including key project partners and stakeholders such as local UWA staff, Kisoro District Local Government representatives (Chief Administrative Officer, District Tourism and Natural Resources Officers), NGOs, and community groups supporting Batwa communities around MGNP.

Participants were purposively selected for their experience with Batwa and conservation work. The following CSOs/NGOs were engaged in this consultation:

- Nkuringo Cultural Center
- Batwa Indigenous Organization
- Mgahinga Tourism Association
- UOBDU
- Bwindi Mgahinga Conservation Trust
- Batwa Development Organization
- BFO Initiative

The feedback received from these stakeholders at this meeting focused on three main areas:

- **Batwa livelihood needs and existing opportunities.** Participants highlighted the need to consider the current livelihood needs and preferred options of Batwa communities living around Mgahinga and explore opportunities from existing conservation projects for possible support under IFPA-CD.
- **Conservation approaches and impact mitigation.** Participants stressed the value of reviewing and integrating lessons learned from earlier conservation efforts to devise project interventions that are more effective and avoid or mitigate any potential adverse impacts on Batwa communities.
- **Institutional strengthening and inclusive stakeholder involvement.** Participants recognised the need to strengthen Kisoro District Local Government and relevant departments, particularly in their ability to address the needs of vulnerable groups like the Batwa. They also noted the importance of clearly defining the responsibilities of key stakeholders involved in implementing the VMGP, including by fostering collaboration among community organizations, leveraging local expertise, and ensuring coordination with national authorities.

It should be noted that certain challenges and proposals from Batwa communities and CSOs were identified as falling without the scope of the IFPA-CD Project. For example, those dealing with land acquisition, their 1990s historical relocation from Mgahinga and the existing UWA revenue sharing scheme, among others, could not be addressed within the Project's activities. This was also communicated to stakeholders during the 2022 consultations. Nevertheless, these concerns are documented here to ensure that the perspectives of Batwa communities and CSOs are fully and accurately represented in this document.

Agreed actions for VMGP implementation under the IFPA-CD Project. The specific activities that had been identified and agreed to be included in this VMGP and supported under IFPA-CD project with the Batwa living adjacent to Mgahinga include the following activities:

- Conduct an inventory of all medicinal plants for further research and mapping, under the leadership of Batwa communities in Mgahinga and for their sole benefit.

- Establish herbal demonstration sites outside the park, in collaboration with local governments and Batwa communities.
- Identify and map out ancestral spiritual Batwa sites in Mgahinga.
- Support Batwa elders to train young ones with the intention of passing on their forest experience
- Organize and train Batwa communities on identification and management of livelihood improvement projects under the CRMs.
- Provide training and inputs for Batwa CRM members under CRM arrangements.

The specific activities proposed for the Batwa in this VMGP for MGNP, as listed above and supported under the IFPA-CD Project, are intended to supplement the measures already included in the General Management Plan for the MGNP. However, it is important to note that the VGMP and other management plans are not meant to be static documents and must be reviewed and updated in response to changing circumstances, project activities or emerging risks. A key aspect of the VMGP is to encourage Batwa communities around MGNP to participate in and equitably benefit from the project through the existing CRM arrangements.

6.3. Phase III: Consultation process for VMGP revision (July 2025 and December 2025)

6.3.1. Background: concerns on VGMP implementation from Batwa representative organisations

In October 2024, during the period of implementation of the VMGP, three Batwa representative organisations - Batwa Development Organisation (BDO), Batwa Indigenous Development Organisation (BIDO) and Batwa Indigenous Empowerment Organisation (BIEO) - expressed concerns that some of their proposals were not fully captured in the original VMGP and therefore, alleged that they were not getting some of the anticipated benefits from the project implementation.

In order to address the concerns of these three CSOs and, where possible, enhance the meaningful overall engagement of Batwa communities with the IFPA-CD project, a team from the MWE/ex-NFA and UWA conducted a third-phase of consultations to engage Batwa communities and relevant NGOs/CSOs and government stakeholders to review the VMGP to include additional issues and/or proposals which were not considered in the original VMGP, also incorporating the lessons learnt from VMGP implementation to date.

6.3.2. Consultation structure and methodology

Consultations to revise the VMGP took place in July 2025. In April 2025, under the leadership of MWE an initial meeting was held with the aforementioned 3 Batwa organisations (BDO, BIDO and BIEO) as well as other organisations working with Batwa communities around MGNP, namely United Organization for Batwa Development in Uganda, Nkuringo Community Development Foundation and BioVision Africa, to start discussion on the VMGP revision.

The formal consultation process for updating the Mgahinga VMGP continued between July 10-11, 2025. Consultations meetings were held with Batwa communities, Batwa-led organisations and key stakeholders supporting Batwa communities in MGNP, including UWA field staff, representatives from the Kisoro District Local Governments Officials, NGOs, and CSOs that work with Batwa

communities around MGNP. A consultation meeting was conducted on 10th July at Kisoro District with 27 District technical staff and NGO and CSO stakeholders, including most of those operating in the area, namely: Kisoro Concern for Marginalized People, BDO, UOBDU, Bwindi Mgahinga Conservation Trust, Kisoro District Community-Based Development Organization, Nkuringo Community Development Foundation, Kisoro District NGO Forum, Kisoro Batwa Community Initiative, LOCAL KID NGO, Rushaga Batwa Cultural Resource, and BIDO. A community consultation to update the VMGP was carried out on July 11, 2025, at Rukeri, with 50 Batwa participants in attendance, inclusive of women, youth and elders. On the same date, a consultative meeting was also held with UWA staff at MGNP Visitor Information Centre.

Consultations were carried out with prior notice given to identified stakeholders and Batwa communities and were held in local languages using translators from among the stakeholders. Batwa-led organisations were encouraged to have staff attend the consultations. The consultation meetings started with providing a brief feedback on the status of the project implementation, status of implementation of the original VMGP and outcomes of the previous consultation process. The key aspects of the VMGP were highlighted and the participants were reminded of the key proposals discussed during the development of the VMGP in 2022. Therefore, the process of updating the VMGP built on the information gathered during the design and implementation of the original VGMP and supplemented with the outcomes of the new rounds of comprehensive consultations held in July 2025.

To ensure effective participation from stakeholders, consultations were open to all relevant stakeholders and at the start of the meeting they were encouraged to freely express their views and opinions, since the review of the VGMP means to capture reality on the ground. Systematic documentation of the process and feedback received then informed the update of the VGMP, with a focus on increasing engagement and relevance of the VGMPs to Batwa communities, having regard to the Project objective, scope and remaining implementation period. Accordingly, the stakeholders consulted were reminded of the importance of agreeing on actions that are feasible, can be feasibly implemented through the project and could be effectively implemented before the Project's closure date (June 2026). For example, issues of land acquisition, the existing government tourism revenue sharing scheme, and the existing Batwa tourism products cannot be feasibly supported through the project due to the project duration and the limited nature of project activities (as described in the legal agreement for the project).

6.3.3. Consultation outputs

During the revision of the VMGP, stakeholders provided valuable feedback on several key areas: the current needs of Batwa communities living around Mgahinga, lessons learned from ongoing VMGP implementation -including both successes and challenges- and proposals for improving the updated VMGP.

Batwa community's needs: stakeholders expressed, among others, the need for training in vegetable and mushroom growing as well as bee value chains; the need for carpentry equipment; more training in apiary, crafts making, wood carving and tailoring as well as the need for seedlings and inputs for weaving. A summary table with issues discussed during the consultations with UWA and the Batwa community in Mgahinga is provided in annex II.

District technical staff and CSO/NGOs representatives: many CSOs reported limited awareness of the IFPA-CD project and called for broader partnerships, especially in herbal medicine promotion and Batwa culture. The need for more inclusive and adequately resourced training, tools provision, and

coordination forums was also emphasized. Investment in an ecolodge and improved revenue sharing for Batwa were seen as valuable steps for sustainable development but were identified as issues outside of the project scope and feasibility.

UWA staff: Participants reported on CRM group training in energy-saving stoves, rainwater harvesting, and woodlot establishment, with Batwa participation in several initiatives. Participants noted Batwa involvement in tourism, portering, and medicinal plant inventory was ongoing, but also pointed out the need for continuous training, expanded portering, and improved access to materials for weaving.

Lessons learned from implementation on the VGMP in MGNP: During the engagements with the Batwa community, NGOs/CSOs and district stakeholders, it was generally acknowledged by community members and implementing officers that the implementation of the project, although still ongoing, has resulted in a number of both positive impacts and limitations.

➤ **Identified positive impacts include:**

- Increased access to forest resources during the invasive species removal.
- Access to job opportunities provided by the project for removal of invasive plant species and buffalo wall re-construction.
- Reduced impact of human wildlife conflict arising from the re-construction/renovation of the buffalo wall, leading to increased agricultural productivity.
- Increased capacity arising from training and inputs to apply such training under CRM arrangements in enterprise development and livelihood interventions, such as mushroom growing, bee keeping, craft making.
- Increased capacity arising from training of CRM committees, community committees, women and youth groups, elders' groups and community-based organizations, in sustainable use and monitoring of forests and wildlife resources
- Resource access, off-take, and monitoring mechanisms have been made more feasible, with clear terms, conditions, and procedures now streamlined and documented to ensure sustainable use and accountability.
- Increased knowledge and awareness to the Batwa and local communities on the importance of sustainable forests and wildlife management
- Documentation of specific medicinal plants as requested by Batwa communities resulting in a wider range of plant species has now been included for community use under the MOUs.

➤ **Identified limitations include:**

- Trainings were undertaken in enterprise development, but the Batwa communities were not supported with start-up capital and more inputs were deemed needed to better initiate their enterprises.¹¹
- Trainings in skills development were not given adequate time for the participants to acquire the required skills in some areas, such as wood carving, tailoring and weaving.
- Some trainings targeted low numbers of Batwa though demand in the community was high.
- Low interest among Batwa in undertaking employment opportunities under the project in certain areas (e.g. those that require physical labour).

¹¹ Provision of additional inputs has now been planned through the project.

- Batwa community expressed that despite training in tree planting, they were not supported with enough tree seedlings.
- High expectations among some Batwa NGOs of direct funding opportunities.
- Historical grievances over removal from the Mgahinga by government remain a factor that affects relations with donor-funded projects.

The revision of the VMGP for MGNP involved a comprehensive consultation process that encompassed both the stakeholder engagements conducted in July 2025 and a subsequent, iterative validation phase. This final validation was carried out in December 2025, to review and confirm the proposed actions under this updated VMGP. Further details about this validation process are provided in Section 7 below.

7. Agreed Actions for the Revised VMGP and Validation

Drawing on the feedback from stakeholders consulted in July 2025 during the VMGP update for Mgahinga and taking into account the Project's objectives, scope and timeframe as well as applicable regulatory and practical constraints, the following targets and actions focused on Batwa communities have been agreed for implementation until present Project closing date in June 2026.

Validation of the proposed actions under this revised VMGP was conducted through a final, iterative consultation process held in December 2025 (that also took place with communities from around Mgahinga NP), involving the same stakeholders who participated in the July 2025 consultations. The invitations to participate stated the objectives and meeting schedule and were sent in advance to the Kisoro District Government for distribution via the Community Development Officer, who is familiar with local stakeholders and are therefore well positioned to facilitate broad participation. Direct invitations were also sent to all CSO /NGO partners previously engaged. A few days after the invitations were sent, a summary of the VMGP, including the targets and proposed activities for the next six months of Project implementation, was also distributed to enable informed and meaningful stakeholder engagement. The consultation process prioritized oral presentations due to limited literacy among community participants. Discussions with the communities were conducted in Rutwa, which is the local language spoken by Batwa communities around MGNP. The process and outcome were duly documented.

Validation meetings were organised in coordination with Batwa communities and community leadership, ensuring participation from elders, women and youth. Meetings were scheduled in culturally appropriate settings and time, with prior notice of at least two weeks and were jointly facilitated by representatives of both MWE and UWA. They presented the VMGP revision process and the proposed actions for implementation under the updated VMGP; responded to questions, invited feedback and explained why certain activities suggested during the July 2025 consultations could not be included in the list of agreed actions for the next six months of VMGP implementation.

In fact, some of the issues raised by stakeholders during the consultations for VMGP revision fell outside the scope and capacity of the Project, such as requests related to existing revenue or benefit-sharing arrangements, the funding of a Batwa ecolodge, and further development of the Batwa cultural trail or Batwa portering. Facilitators clearly explained these limitations to stakeholders emphasizing that while all feedback and proposals were welcome, some could not be accommodated into the revised VMGP due to Project scope, regulatory and/or practical constraints.

The validation of the revised VMGP for Mgahinga Gorilla NP was held on 8 December 2025 in the Batwa settlement of Nyakacence in Kisoro district, engaging a total of 54 community members (26 male and 28 female). This meeting, facilitated by MWE and UWA staff aimed to align VMGP interventions with community priorities and document feedback for implementation planning. Representatives of 10 local CSOs, as well as the District Labour officer who represented the District Community Development Officer and the District Tourism Officer also took an active part in the validation exercise.

Representatives of two local CSOs – BDO and Civil Society Coalition on Indigenous Peoples in Uganda (CSCIP-U) took an active part in the validation exercise and supported mobilization of some communities, supported interpretation during some of the community engagements, and provided clarification to community members during the engagements.

Endorsement during community validation meetings was reached through signing by the chosen community representatives. Once the community reached a consensus on the proposed actions, the Batwa community members who participated in the validation session elected three representatives for the community from among themselves. These chosen representatives endorsed the list of agreed actions on behalf of the community, either by co-signing or by providing their fingerprint as confirmation.

Table 6. Proposed actions for implementation in MGNP (under updated VMGP)

Target	Implementable Interventions	Estimated Cost (UGX)	Time Frame	Resp Person
Target 1: Expanded CRM access for Batwa community members	Initiate MOU for the establishment of Batwa only CRM for beekeeping and medicinal plants demonstration plot in Nyakacece Batwa community	54,000,000	March 2026	UWA (Chief Warden for Bwindi and Mgahinga)
Target 2: capacity of CRM executive committees strengthened through training and improved coordination	a. Support CRM groups to establish a coordination platform (e.g. WhatsApp group) that brings together all CRM leadership in Mgahinga Gorilla National Park.	Deskwork	March 2026	Internally by UWA
	b. Conduct leadership training for the CRM group executives	72,000,000		Service Provider to be procured by UWA
Target 3: job opportunities for Batwa community members	Employ the willing Batwa community members on control and removal of invasive species	Budget on the invasive removal activity	June 30 th 2026	Internally by UWA
Target 4: improved access to medicinal plants for Batwa community members	Support the Batwa community to establish a medicinal demonstration plot along the MGNP buffer zone (a two meter strip of land outside and along the wall) for the Nyakacece community (part of the MOU as mentioned above)	54,000,000	March – May 2026	Internally by UWA

Target 5: improved livelihoods opportunities for the Batwa community members	Targeted additional and refresher training to develop Batwa skills to actively participate in and benefit from the management of forest and wildlife resources. Provision of startup inputs for all the trainees	270,000,000	May – June 2026	Service Provider to be procured by UWA
	New Trainings Tour guiding, hospitality, customer care; marketing; tailoring, salon; motorcycle repair			
	Refresher Training Crafts (weaving); Beekeeping and bee value chain; vegetable (including Irish potato and cabbage) and mushroom growing; Construction of energy saving stoves			
	Livestock Support Sheep, Goats, Poultry, Cows			
Target 6: improved access to water resources for household consumption	Provide rainwater harvesting tanks within the Batwa settlements: Nyakacece community (One tank); Rukyeri (Water shed)	20,000,000	Feb 2026	UWA-field team
Target 7: support Batwa communities in recording traditional Batwa knowledge for their use	Translate phase 1 of herbal medicine inventory into Rufumbira language	36,000,000	March 2026	Service Provider to be procured by UWA
	Print 50 copies per language (English & Rufumbira) for use by the Batwa communities	54,000,000	March 2026	Service Provider to be procured by UWA
	Conduct 2nd phase of herbal medicine inventory - Ongoing and will continue	140,000,000	March 2026	Service Provider to be procured by UWA

8. Applicability of Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC)

The IFPA-CD project team has consulted with the Batwa communities during the project design with dedicated sessions specific to the Batwa, for example during the preparation of ESMF and preparation of VMGF as well as during project implementation. The preparation of VMGP has been entirely dedicated to Batwa, and their full engagement has been secured during this process. Informed consultations through culturally appropriate methods with Batwa communities have been carried out,

leading to broad community support of the project; identification of aspirations and agreed actions to address priority needs within the scope and objectives of the project and lessons learnt for adaptive management. The project has thereby applied the standard of meaningful consultations tailored to the Batwa people living around Mgahinga NP.

FPIC, however, is deemed not to apply to the Project, including in Mgahinga. Under ESS7, FPIC is required for specific circumstances that have a negative impact on Indigenous peoples/VMGs, namely when the Project will:

- (a) Have adverse impacts on land and natural resources subject to their traditional ownership or under customary use or occupation;*
- (b) Cause their relocation from land and natural resources subject to traditional ownership or under customary use or occupation;*
- (c) Have significant impacts on their cultural heritage that is material to their identity and/or cultural, ceremonial, or spiritual aspects of their lives; and*
- (d) Use their cultural heritage for commercial purposes*

In this case, project activities have not entailed (and were not expected to entail) relocation of Batwa communities, nor have they caused adverse impacts on the lands and resources traditionally used by them or any significant impacts on cultural heritage material to their identity, cultural, ceremonial, or spiritual practices as provided for ESS7. As noted earlier in this document, Mgahinga NP was gazetted and the Batwa communities living therein were relocated long before the Project began and, hence, the Batwa also completely lost access to such lands and resources several decades ago (around the 1990s) prior to the IFPA-CD Project. Project activities have neither altered the boundaries of the protected area nor have supported any physical demarcation of boundaries in the areas where Batwa people are present. In Mgahinga, the Project has supported infrastructure improvements such as the rebuilding of the buffalo stone wall. However, breaks/access points have been maintained. Adjacent communities also continue to physically access forest resources under CRM arrangements or on an ad hoc basis upon request to UWA.

The project has not made the terms of access for Batwa or other local park adjacent communities more restrictive than what was previously regulated or agreed upon through CRM frameworks, which the Project seeks to support and scale up. Rather, in this regard, it has further promoted Batwa's involvement in CRMs. These regulated arrangements are based on national law, and were already in place prior to the project's inception and continue to allow Batwa communities regularized access to and benefit from resources within the protected areas, including through Project livelihood support activities (as further detailed in this VMGP). In addition, while the Project also provides some limited support to enhanced park management capacity, mainly through provision of few equipment and technical assistance, this was not expected to result (and has not resulted) in losses of livelihoods or increased restrictions to access park resources that could cause material harm to Batwa communities' subsistence or cultural heritage, as they continue to access them under CRM arrangements and on an ad hoc basis, as it was the case since the 1990s.

The Project does not support any activities involving the commercial development of Batwa communities' cultural heritage or traditional knowledge. It has also not imposed any restrictions on access to their cultural heritage, which continues to be safeguarded under existing CRM arrangements and park management plans. Importantly, the so called "Batwa trail" in Mgahinga was established prior to this Project and is neither related to nor is supported by Project activities.

In support of cultural preservation, and as requested by the Batwa communities during consultations, the Project has facilitated the documentation of Batwa traditional knowledge, including the development of an inventory of herbal medicines used by Batwa communities in Mgahinga and other protected areas, with Batwa leadership.

9. Implementation Arrangements

The implementation arrangements for the VMGP are aligned with the IFPA-CD implementation framework and collaborating institutions for implementation participate through a competitive process where needed. The main government bodies with responsibilities in VMGP implementation are UWA, which is tasked with procurement, contract management, direct implementation for some activities, and reporting on the activities agreed in this VMGP. The local governments of Kisoro District, as part of their general government mandate, participate in the ground monitoring and follow up on livelihood activities. The Ministry of Water and Environment (MWE) in collaboration with Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities (MTWA) provides the overall strategic direction, supervision and overall monitoring of implementation of the plan in sync with the overall IFPA-CD project. Implementation of all agreed activities will continue to be guided by the MGNP General Management Plan (including the new General Management Plan 2025/2026-2034/2035 once it has been adopted), this VMGP, and the approved Project work plans.

The District Local Government of Kisoro, including the Sub-counties and parishes that make up the Local Council System, play a role in local community engagement, so the Project has put in place some actions for strengthening its capacity. In May 2025 the project supported orientation training of all project District stakeholders on inclusion and non-discrimination with emphasis of involvement of all project stakeholders in decision-making, participation and access to benefits. The project grievance mechanism also uses the mainstream LC system, and the project has supported establishment and training of the Grievance Redress Committee for Mgahinga NP, Kisoro District committee as well as the two subcounty committees bordering the park (Nyarusiza and Muramba) in 2023 and 2025.¹²

It should be noted that the VMGP has a broad range of stakeholders and partners. Stakeholders' participation in management of wildlife resources should be enhanced through shared roles and responsibilities and ensure equitable distribution and sharing of conservation benefits and/or costs. Wildlife conservation has diverse issues, diversity of stakeholders, and, therefore, needs to increase stakeholders' participation to enhance benefits from conservation. Protected areas are a source of various benefits to local people who need guidance to sustainably access these resources and manage any arising conflicts. In addition to government agencies, there are a number of non-governmental partners with relevant expertise that can be drawn upon. These partners are important for regular engagement under the project.

There are several CSOs and NGOs working with Batwa communities around MGNP, including those led by Batwa, such as the BIEO, Batwa Development Organization, Batwa Indigenous Development Organization, United Organization for Batwa Development in Uganda (which is the most established advocacy body and is co-led by Batwa and non-Batwa staff); the Kisoro Concern for Marginalized People, Bwindi Mgahinga Conservation Trust, Kisoro District Community-Based Development

¹² Training of the Local Council 1 Chairpersons is expected to be completed in early 2026 (see also section 10 below on Grievance Redress Mechanism).

Organization, Nkuringo Community Development Foundation, Kisoro District NGO Forum, Kisoro Batwa Community Initiative, Kigezi Orphans and Vulnerable Children Living with HIV/AIDS (KADOLHA), LOCAL KID NGO, Rushaga Batwa Cultural Resource, and Batwa Development Program (BDP).

Other relevant non-governmental partners in the area include Pro-biodiversity conservationists in Uganda (PROBICOU); International Gorilla conservation program (IGCP); Gorilla Organisation (GO); the Institute of tropical forest conservation (ITFC); Conservation through Public Health (CTPH); and Mbarara University of Science and Technology (MUST).

During the implementation of activities outlined in this revised VMGP for MGNP, deliberate efforts were and will continue to be employed to include the Batwa-led institutions or institutions working with Batwa communities in implementation of specific activities especially those targeting Batwa communities, provided that this is possible within the limits of requirements of the World Bank Procurement Framework. The latter has to be complied with by any contractor or implementing partners operating with funding from the IFPA-CD.

Specific terms of reference will be issued for specific activities and requests made. The requests shall be evaluated by the technical teams from UWA before a decision is made. Key considerations will include:

- a. Experience of the applicant working with the Batwa and other vulnerable groups
- b. Membership and group structures (*if any*)
- c. Description of the modalities and direct Batwa engagement in the implementation and/management of benefits from the business activity.

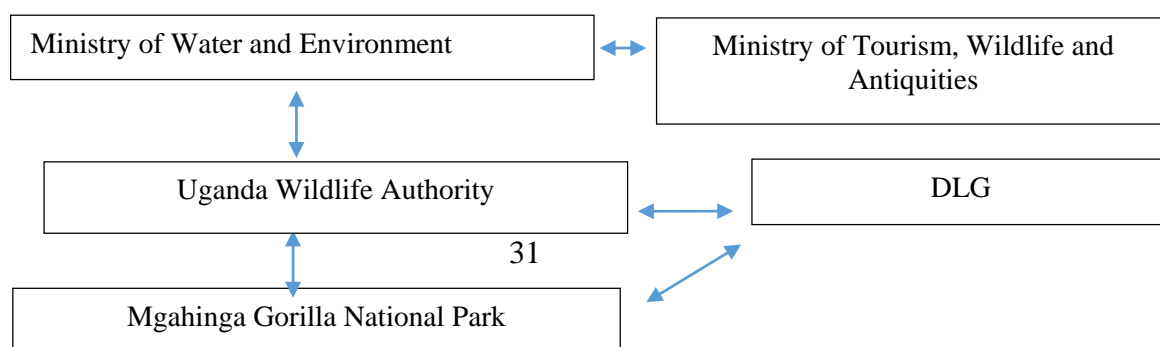
The applicants for support to Batwa groups will include all supporting documents, in line with the call for proposals and terms of reference.

Table 7. Stakeholders' roles and responsibilities

Key stakeholder	Role in the Implementation of the VMGP
Government agencies	
Ministry of Water and Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide strategic direction and monitor overall implementation of VMGP. • Overall supervision of the preparation and implementation of VMGPs • Participate in the district level meetings • Coordinate with other Government Line Departments for ensuring effective delivery of mitigation. • Make budgetary provisions for implementation of project activities. • Provide technical support for implementation of the actions in the VMGP • Consolidate project reporting, including on implementation of VMGP
Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife and Antiquities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advise on marketing tourism products • Participate and guide the development of Tourism products
UWA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of activities identified in the VMGP (procurement and contract management, procurement of inputs, etc.). • Supervision of plans and reporting to ministry
Kisoro District Local Governments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participating in monitoring activities. • Instrumental in supporting mobilisation of communities, formation of CRM, following up implementation of plans, including livelihoods and income-generating activities, on the ground provision of technical guidance, and in dispute settlement

Non-governmental partners that could be involved in implementation of VMGP activities	
Pro-biodiversity conservationists in Uganda (PROBICOU)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobilise Batwa through Organized Batwa Organizations, carry out training on indigenous issues and conservation, strengthen the Batwa Forest Trail, work with Batwa in restoration and planting of indigenous trees in pocket forests, advocacy and revenue sharing management, support Batwa livelihood programs.
International Gorilla conservation program (IGCP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support community development enterprises around the PA, support problem animal control, support tourism development, Field equipment support
Bwindi Conservation Trust (BMCT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support Batwa access to land to facilitate livelihood demonstration projects, resettlement programs, and community development.
Gorilla Organisation (GO)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problem animal control, energy saving technologies, enterprise development
Institute of tropical forest conservation (ITFC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research and documentation, promotion of conservation, forestry, etc
Conservation through public health (CTPH)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community health awareness, disease surveillance (human and wildlife)
United Organisation for Batwa Development in Uganda (UOBDU)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocacy for Batwa development, Mobilization of Batwa in MGNP, and support for livelihoods
Mbarara University of Science and Technology (MUST)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research on medical herbs, cultural sites and piloting medicinal gardens, supporting Batwa Forest Experience
NGO Forum Kisoro	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness and advocacy for conservation benefit sharing
Batwa Development Program (BDP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocacy and resettlement, awareness on human rights
Other Batwa led NGOs:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Batwa Development Organisation (BDO), Batwa Indigenous Development Organisation (BIDO), Batwa Indigenous Empowerment Organisation (BIEO), Action for Batwa Empowerment Group (ABEG), The United Organisation for Batwa Development in Uganda (UOBDU) • Mobilization of the Batwa, training and capacity building, knowledge sharing, and support of livelihood activities etc.

Figure 3. Coordination and implementation Structure



10. Monitoring and Evaluation

The monitoring of this revised VMGP shall continue being part of the overall M&E Framework for the IFPA-CD project. The MWE has the overall responsibility for coordinating M&E and ensuring that data and information are produced on time and of the necessary quality, including reporting on Project performance and results. Monitoring data will be collected at field and agency level by UWA and forwarded to UWA and the Project Coordinating Unit (PCU) for consolidated reporting. Implementing Agencies (MWE and UWA) will host and participate in any field monitoring visits.

Alongside the M&E Framework, project reporting formats and feedback mechanisms have been developed for use by UWA, DLGs and the TSPs. UWA field staff has received training on stakeholder engagement and reporting templates. Available feedback mechanisms also include the GRCs and suggestions boxes installed around MGNP.

In the case of the implementing agent for the Batwa or the TSP, the reporting formats will be appended to the Service Contracts. This revised VMGP already highlights key targets and indicators in section 7 above that shall inform the design of data collection tools for effective monitoring of this VMGP.

Monitoring will be the main mechanism through which the implementers of this revised VMGP will get feedback and alerts on any delays and problems. The monitoring framework will help the implementers to measure the pace of implementation of activities. It enables timely responses while providing lessons on implementation strategies. It will also help to ascertain whether the IFPA-CD project activities are aligned with this revised VMGP, the World Bank ESF and national policy and legal procedures that provide for participation of the VMGs (Batwa).

The Project will support the engagement of community Batwa leaders during monitoring visits conducted by UWA/MWE to oversee implementation of the activities agreed in this revised VMGP.

The monitoring activities will result in regular feedback on the implementation of the VMGP, which is shared with UWA and MWE for learning and improvement of implementation modalities. The scope of Monitoring Indicators shall include the following:

- Collaborative resource management
- Livelihoods activities support
- Awareness
- Employment in project funded activities

11. Administrative Reporting and Grievance Redress Mechanisms

The standard record of activities undertaken in each reporting period, along with financial information, will continue to be provided until the Project closes in June 2026. For this revised VMGP, quarterly and annual project progress reports will include a section that details, for instance, the number and type of local meetings held, the number and types of grievances registered and their resolution, and

the nature of measures implemented. This will benefit from routine collection of data from activity reports.

The Project Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM) in and around national parks, including Mgahinga, is structured with four levels of Grievance Redress Committees (GRCs) in addition to the national level: at the Conservation Area, District, Subcounty, and Village levels (existing Local Council LC1). In the case of MGNP, the project has established and trained the Grievance Redress Committee for Mgahinga NP, the Kisoro District Committee and the two Subcounty Committees bordering the park (Nyarusiza and Muramba) in 2023 and 2025. Arrangements for training village leaders (Local Council 1 Chairpersons) in communities bordering the protected areas are ongoing. In May 2025 orientation training was provided to all project District stakeholders on inclusion and non-discrimination with emphasis of involvement of all project stakeholders in decision-making, participation and access to benefits. The GRCs have also been equipped with essential tools, including complaint registers, complaints logs, and reporting templates, which are actively being used.

The composition of the GRCs takes into consideration the diverse stakeholder interest groups in the project areas, including the Batwa communities adjacent to the targeted protected areas, as well as the local dispute management models and the involvement of local leaders. For example, the LC1 level GRC is comprised of the Local Council one (LC1) committee members elected by the village members. The GRC training targets only the Chairperson LC1s with the hope that he/she will pass on the acquired skills to the rest of the committee members. The Subcounty level GRC includes Subcounty officials and NGO/CBO representatives. A wide range of channels have been put in place to facilitate access and use of the Project GRM, particularly by Batwa communities and vulnerable groups (e.g., youth and women). These include toll free phone lines, WhatsApp lines and email for submission of project related grievances directly to the MWE or UWA. In addition, suggestion boxes have been distributed by UWA to communities bordering the PAs to allow them to drop in their grievances, including anonymous written complaints. In MGNP, 10 suggestions boxes have been installed in strategic locations within villages surrounding the PA and at the field office of UWA. UWA field personnel are responsible for collecting the grievances from the boxes on a weekly basis and register them in the PA logbook to ensure that they are properly addressed and recorded.

Information on these channels is disseminated through posters widely circulated to local leaders and communities in the project districts. The posters have been printed in English and translated and printed in the different languages spoken in the project areas, including the local language spoken by Batwa people around Mgahinga (Rukiga and Kifumbira).

Within the GRCs, two people (male and female) with reasonable experience and exposure in managing GBV issues are assigned the task of handling GBV, SEA, SH, and VAC complaints issues with the confidentiality it demands. Their main responsibility is referring cases to the relevant government offices, such as the community development office, probation and social welfare office, psycho-social service providers, the police department for child and family affairs, and nearby health facilities for emergency care, contraceptives, and post-exposure prophylaxis to reduce the risk of HIV infection. The GBV committee is also charged with providing psychological support and legal advice for survivors and support reintegration into the workforce and community at large. These complaints are treated with strict sensitivity and confidentiality.

In addition, the Project also has an incident report mechanism for documenting and managing serious events reportable to the Bank and other types of incidents that still need to be duly recorded and handled, including those that may occur inside or nearby the national parks, including Mgahinga. This

incident report mechanism is further detailed in the Project's Environmental and Social Management Framework.

Further details on the project GRM structure and channels for submitting concerns and grievances can be found in the Project's SEP.

12. Budget and Financing Arrangements for the VMGP

According to the project implementation manual for IFPA-CD project, section 3 (the project description), sub-component 1.2 is about increasing the involvement of local communities in the management of forest and wildlife by increasing their access and benefits from these areas. The activities proposed in this VMGP are financed and will continue being financed under this subcomponent.

This subcomponent will support technical assistance packages and training aimed at developing skills at the community level to actively participate in and benefit from the management of wildlife resources. This would include enhancing the adaptive capacity of forest dependent communities for climate resilience by strengthening their coping strategies, diversifying forest management-related employment opportunities and livelihoods, and adaptive planning and management. This comprises technical assistance packages with targeted support for women to empower them to participate and take leadership roles in natural resources management. At the field level, support will be provided for community engagement in the management of resources within MGNP. This includes the establishment of new CRM groups and support of livelihood activities within existing groups.

The budgeting arrangements for implementation of the VMGP follow those of the overall budgeting arrangements of the IFPA-CD project, in accordance with GoU budgeting procedures and fiscal year (July-June). UWA has facilitated the development of a work plan with timeline and budget for specific activities targeting the Batwa in line with this revised VMGP (see section 7 above). This plan has been integrated in the overall annual project work plans and budgets prepared by UWA and approved by the Project Steering Committee, MWE and IDA.

Once funds have been received by UWA, funds for implementation of VMGP activities will be spent in accordance with approved work plans. UWA will work with the TSP competitively selected to execute activities as per agreed terms. TSPs shall report to UWA, and the financial reports shall be integrated into general Annual Reports of UWA.

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Annex I. CRM Groups and agreements in Mgahinga National Park

Five MOUs are in place in Mgahinga – out of these, one is related to tourism (Batwa trail), with the MoU for Batwa Trail having expired and being under renewal (outside of the scope of the IFPA-CD Project).

At the time of the project start, there were no general resource MOUs in place – so two new MOUs were signed in two Subcounties bordering the park in 2025 with project support. There are also two MOUs with beekeepers' groups, in place since 2021, which are due for renewal – renewal is also being supported with project funds.

CRM MoUs on resource access/use (number, status & project support)	1	Gitenderi Beekeepers, October 22, 2021, in force (under review with Project support)	Number of Batwa community members in CRM MoUs	11
	2	Gisozi Beekeepers, October 25, 2021, in force (under review with Project support)		03
	3	Resource Use Gisozi Parish, June 10, 2025, in force (negotiated and concluded with Project support)		16
	4	Resource Use Gitenderi Parish, June 11, 2025, in force (negotiated and concluded with Project support)		00
Total	4 CRM Resource Access/Use MoU with MGNP adjacent communities, including Batwa members. Total of 30 Batwa members, of which 7 are part of the respective Resource User’s Executive Committee			

A new resource access/use MoU with Nyakacece Beekeepers (Batwa-only) is currently **under negotiation with Project support**. This is expected to have around 45 to 60 Batwa members once it gets signed, including 09 Batwas in the Resource Use Executive Committee.

As noted above, there are also two tourism-related MOUs/agreements between UWA and Batwa groups that are not connected to the IFPA-CD Project. These are:

- Garama Batwa cultural trail experience (Batwa-only), 2015, (renewal underway, without Project support) – 32 Batwa members.
- Bwindi-Mgahinga Porters' Association, Sept 23, 2025 – 06 Batwa members from the Mgahinga Porters' Association which is an affiliation to Bwindi Mgahinga Porter's Association.

Annex II. Summary of issues discussed during consultations for VMGP revision

Stakeholder Groups Engaged	Key Issues Raised during various consultations with Batwa CSOs, Batwa communities and UWA in the area of MGNP in July 2025	Feedback provided by Batwa stakeholders during consultations:
UWA staff Meeting Date - 11 July 2025	<p>UWA informed the meeting that the following activities were carried out for all community members, including Batwa:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 CRM groups were trained in energy saving stoves, rain water harvesting and woodlot establishment • Distributed 5,000 tree seedlings to community members, including to Batwa • Distributed water tanks to community members. It was conditioned that whoever is to get a water tank should have built an energy saving stove. • During reconstruction of the stone wall and invasive species removal Batwa community members were employed. • Batwa were trained in enterprise development (50 Batwa were organized and trained on weaving baskets and mats, wood carving, making bee wax candles & jelly; mushrooms and vegetable growing, among others) • Conducted inventory of Batwa medicinal plants. A booklet is under preparation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is need for training in vegetable and mushroom growing as well as bee value chains • Some Batwa are used as porters and they get some money. There is need to bring more porters on board (this is not part of the IFPA-CD project, as explained during consultations). • There should be continuous engagement of Batwa to help them integrate in the general community to enable them cope and fit in society • Some Batwa gained skills in weaving but have not acquired materials to enable them practice what they were taught • Money collected from the Batwa trail to be spent on projects benefiting their community (this is not part of the IFPA-CD Project, as explained during consultations).
Batwa community at Nyacancence – 11 July 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trained Batwa in woodlot establishment but Batwa were not given opportunity to receive seedlings • Trained in energy saving technologies but only a few benefitted • No water tanks given to Batwa 	<p>Batwa communities feedback during consultations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retraining in crafts making and wood carving

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There was an allegation that the people were to pay 10 bags of cement before receiving the tanks • There was a promise of a shelter for the energy saving stoves. • Trained in wood carving by BMCT 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need equipment for carpentry • More trainings in apiary • Training in tailoring • Seedlings
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Annex III. Summary table of stakeholders consulted for VMGP development and revision

Consultations for VMGP development and revision	
VMGF Validation, 2020	52 persons
Batwa community members - Phase 1 – 2021	16 persons
Batwa community members - Phase 2 – 2022	67 persons
CSO/NGOs representatives (Phase 2 only) – 2022	22 persons
Batwa community members – Phase 3 (VMGP revision) – 2025	50 persons
CSOs/ NGOs - VMGP revision – 2025 Kisoro District	11* organizations (includes partner engagement for Mgahinga, Bwindi and Echuya)
Batwa community members - Revised VMGP validation	54 Persons
CSO / NGOs – Revised VMGP validation	10** organizations (includes partner engagement for Mgahinga, Bwindi and Echuya)

* Batwa Development Organization, Batwa Indigenous Development Organization, Kisoro Concern for Marginalized People, United Organization for Batwa Development in Uganda, Bwindi Mgahinga Conservation Trust, Kisoro District Community-Based Development Organization, Nkuringo Community Development Foundation, Kisoro District NGO Forum, Kisoro Batwa Community Initiative, LOCAL KID NGO, Rushaga Batwa Cultural Resource.

** Kisoro Concern for Marginalized, Batwa Development Organization, Stichting Kyakabi, Nkuringo Community Development Foundation, Kisoro Batwa Community Initiative, Bwindi Mgahinga Conservation Trust, Gorilla Organisation, Kisoro District NGO Forum, KADOLHA, UOBDU, Action for Batwa Empowerment Group, Batwa Development Programme