



THE RWENZORI REGION CONFLICT ANALYSIS REPORT 2021



MARCH 2022

Cover photo description:

Human-wildlife conflicts are common place around Uganda's wildlife conservation areas. As reported and experience during the implementation of the Networks for Peace Project based on conflict early warning, the conflicting parties (UWA and the local communities) engage to alleviate the dire consequences of the conflict.

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Abstract

The conflict mapping for the Rwenzori region in 2020 was a prelude to the launch of the Networks for Peace Project that heralded the prevention and resolution of conflicts through early warning mechanisms in Africa, focusing on the Basongora and Batuku Minority Communities in Rwenzori Sub-region of Uganda. So, three years in a row (2020, 2021 and 2022), KRC Uganda in partnership with Minority Rights Group International, with financial support from UKAID has been conducting annual situational reviews of conflicts in region with particular interest in Kasese District where the minority Basongora pastoral community co-exists alongside other larger ethnic groups, mainly the Bakonzo who are predominantly crop farmers. From the past to present, the two ethnic groups have co-existed with interethnic conflicts over resources, governance issues and cultural differences. The Networks for Peace Project which builds on prior conflict prevention and peace building initiatives by KRC and stakeholders in the region is now focusing of building and strengthening conflict early warning mechanisms to pacify a region that is historically prone to conflicts. The review of the conflict situation of 2021 was conducted among the Basongora pastoral community, in the Sub Counties of Nyakatonzi, Katwe Kabatooro, Lake Katwe, Muhokya, Karusandara and Hima Town Council, Kasese District. The objectives of the mapping were to identify the conflict triggers in the area and their respective indicators, the existing early warning mechanisms and the challenges encountered in addressing the conflict contexts. Following the 2021 review, interventions were undertaken by KRC Uganda working with and through selected community volunteers, known as Peace Ambassadors. As part of the monitoring and evaluation in implementation of the project, KRC thought it imperative to conduct a review of the conflict context. The nature of the review and the compilation of this report is informed by the conflict issues that were identified in the first conflict mapping namely: UWA Community issues, Inter-ethnic issues, Intra-ethnic issues, domestic/interpersonal conflicts, land and political issues. It also gives recommendations for the respective stakeholders.

Table of Contents

Abstract	2
Acronyms	4
Background	5
Objectives of the study	5
Scope of the study	5
Methodology	6
Inception meeting and task planning	6
Sampling	6
Validation	6
Emerging issues during the study	5
The community – UWA conflicts	5
Besides, the following issues were reported to be still outstanding:	6
Domestic & Inter-Personal Conflicts	9
The Inter-Ethnic Conflicts	9
The Land Issues	10
The Political Issues	11
UWA should:	12
The government should:	12
Civil society should:	13
The community should:	13

Acronyms

ADF	Allied Democratic Front
CDRN	Community Development Resource Network
DISO	District Internal Security Officer
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
KCCL	Kasese Cobalt Company Limited
NAADS	National Agricultural Advisory Services
NALU	National Army for the Liberation of Uganda
NEMA	National Environmental Management Authority
NRA	National Resistance Army
NRM	National Resistance Movement
OBB	Obudingiya Bwa Bwamba
OBR	Obusinga Bwa Rwenzururu
OWC	Operation Wealth Creation
SACCO	Savings and Credit Cooperative Organization
UNRA	Uganda National Roads Authority
UPDF	Uganda People's Defense Forces
UWA	Uganda Wildlife Authority

Background

Conflicts in the Rwenzori sub region have evolved overtime. Since the pre-colonial days, the conflict has taken different twists, largely leaning to more ethnic causes, pitting one indigenous community against the other. Whereas at the time of the initial conflict mapping (2020) conflict was more apparent between the Bakonzo and the Basongora; owing to the socio-political marginalization of the latter as well as their differing livelihoods of crop farming and pastoralism, the currently outstanding conflict is between the local communities and Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA), the public agency responsible for managing wildlife conservation areas, in particular, Queen Elizabeth National Park. The communities not only suffer constant invasion of wild life that attack humans, destroy crops and property. In the name of conservation, people are arrested and jailed, their livestock is confiscated and auctioned by Uganda Wildlife Authority to the consternation of the community members.

Objectives of the study

The review exercise was commissioned to:

1. Find out what has changed since the 2020 conflict mapping was conducted and the interventions thereof
2. Suggest more interventions to address the emerging context of conflict in the region.

Scope of the study

The review was conducted in the Sub-counties of Nyakatonzi, Lake Katwe, Karusandara, Muhokya and Hima Town Council. Uganda Wildlife Authority, Civil Society Organizations working with minority communities, police and the District and sub-county local Government leaders were also part of the respondents. The period covered for the review activity was fifteen (15) working days. The focus of the study was to explore the existing conflict indicators, early warning mechanisms and responses to conflict in the traditional community, the mechanisms for feedback and relations building with the respective stakeholders.

Methodology

The study undertook a qualitative approach, including qualitative interviews with key informants drawn from amongst men, women and youth. The other respondents were drawn from Civil Society, leaders of local governments, public agencies and security organs.

Inception meeting and task planning

The consultant held an inception with the KRC project staff to plan the activity and discuss the field logistics and the dynamics involved. Among the issues discussed were the scope of the work: the areas for data collection, the numbers and categories of respondents, the tools for data collection, and the time scope for accomplishing the assignment, the procedures and ethical issues to be followed in conducting the exercise.

Sampling

The study employed purposive sampling to get respondents from Sub-counties where the conflict mapping and the subsequent activities had been conducted. The respondents included men, women and youth above the age of 18, who were knowledgeable about the conflict context. Other respondents were leaders of Civil Society Organizations, Police and Local Government councilors. Sample respondents were identified from the Sub-counties of Nyakatonzi, Karusandara, Katwe Kabatooro and Hima Town Council in Kasese.

Validation

After compilation of the issues, they were presented before a forum of representatives of community members, local government leaders in the district, Police, UWA and Civil Society Organizations. During the discussions in the validation meeting, some of the issues were corrected, others accepted and consensus drawn on what was true and what should be recommended. The issues that came out of the validation workshop are what we have reflected in this report.

Emerging issues during the study

The community – UWA conflicts

The Basongora communities share boundaries with Queen Elizabeth National Park. The common sources of contention between the two neighbours are pasture, water in the park and security of persons and property in the communities. In either case, during the dry season, cows wander to the national park in search of pasture and water thus breaching park regulations. In the case of Basongora however, particularly in Nyakatonzi sub-county, even when it is not necessarily a dry season, the cattle watering grounds are located within the national park. It is therefore possible that cows can feed on the park pasture on their way from the watering point, thus posing high potential for conflict between cattle owners and park authorities. On one hand, wild animals also wander to the community in search for food, especially when maize fields have started flowering, thus causing destruction of crops and other properties for community members. This phenomenon has been persistent and there seems to be no clear solution in sight soon, thus a persistent trigger.

What is more intriguing in this relationship is the intensity of UWA restrictions on access to the park whether for pasture, water or game for the hunters. UWA regulations are so strict that actually it was alleged that if one is caught in the park illegally, they are killed and the body is not given to the relatives for a decent burial.

On the other hand, the community suffers constant loss of human life, livestock and property to the wildlife without any compensation. For example, crocodiles kill human beings attending to the cows or fetching water, hippos destroy crops and houses but the victims are not compensated at all. For instance, in Katwe-Kabatooro Town council, two people were disabled by the buffalos and a Hippo destroyed a residential house of one of the citizens, another Buffalo killed a man at Hamukungu, then 35 cows in Nyakatonzi were confiscated and auctioned. For all such losses to the community members, there was no compensation to the affected. This further sours the relations between UWA and the community, as the constant losses increase the intensity of the latent conflict.

What has changed since the previous review is that money in royalties for 2019/2020 and 2020/2021 financial years, has been released but it is still with the UWA authorities, awaiting submissions of budgetary/financial requisitions from the district. It was understood that the communities have to submit their plans to the sub-counties, the sub-counties submit to the district, the district submits to UWQSA offices at Queen Elizabeth National Park which forwards the documents to UWA headquarters for consideration. The reviewer was informed that this process is on course without divulging information when the matter would be settled.

Besides, the following issues were reported to be still outstanding:

- The community is not involved in determining the 20% of the royalties. Although UWA that they give the district indicative figures for planning purposes, it is not clear to the community how much money is collected by the park for a given period of time, and what criteria is used to determine the 20% money that should go to the community as royalties. There is still an outcry from the community to get involved in this process.
- Whereas there is always an MOU entered into between the community and UWA to allow community members access the park for essential items like firewood and medicine, the same has not been in place since the expiration of the MOUs in 2018. It was reported that UWA was responsible for the delays.
- Whereas there is an existing Act of 2019 that guides the operations of Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) operations, the community has neither accessed nor understood the provisions of the Act by which they are bound as they relate with the Park. Much as UWA explained that the regulations to operationalize the Act are still in parliamentary processes, the communities continue to wonder what regulations UWA uses to arrest people, confiscate livestock and levy heavy fines on those who trespass into the park whether deliberately or accidentally.
- The communities are blaming UWA of hypocrisy whereby UWA uses the Wildlife Act, 2019 to punish culprits who trespass into the national park, yet they do not use the same law to compensate victims of wild life, despite the fact that the same Act provides for compensation of the victims.
- The integrated Park management committees at the Sub-counties are not functioning. This continues to leave wildlife victims at the mercy of UWA, while depriving the community of the benefits and services for which such committees were put in place. Besides, the community does not have access to the Park management plan.
- The crocodiles were reported to be depleting the lake of fish while killing and injuring people at the same time. It was reported that UWA has not appropriately responded to cases at Katunguru landing site – Kasese side, over the three people that were killed by crocodiles.
- UWA was tasking it upon itself to designate fish breeding zones within the lake, which is a preserve of the Ministry of Fisheries, and would go ahead to prevent fishermen from accessing the respective areas. This has left the fishermen wondering where UWA derives the mandate to designate breeding grounds for fish.
- The communities blame UWA for a general slow response whenever there is a problem caused by wildlife, yet when there is a reported issue of a community member entering the Park, even for a simple issue like fetching firewood, the response is instant.

- The fines slapped by UWA upon community members who are caught trespassing in the National park are way too high and the community wonders which laws are used to determine the amount of fines demanded. A case was cited of a community member who was caught fetching firewood in the park, arrested, fined eight million Uganda shillings and put in jail because he could not afford to raise the money. He was released out of clemency after serving eight months in prison.
- There were allegations of UWA branding those fetching firewood in the park as poachers.
- Wild animals, particularly elephants, were reported to have found an escape in Karusandara area where there is no electric fence at the Park border and invaded communities. They have invaded and destroyed crop fields around the areas of Rukoki, Kanyangeya and Karusandara for three consecutive seasons without harvest, as well as terrorized community members who seem to have remained under quarantine (post-COVID-19 lock down) due to the fear of being attacked by wild animals.
- There was an outcry from Community members who live at the landing sites that they were forced to pay entry fees to UWA whenever they tried to take their children for boat rides on the lake, even when they were using their own boats.
- The park boundary trench near Rukoki was reported to be too shallow to block the animals from crossing to the communities.
- UWA opened boundaries in Kahendero forcefully without involving the communities.
- UWA was blamed for not compensating two victims severely injured by wildlife: Tumusime Evalyne, 70 main by a buffalo in January 2022 while Dembe Richard was mauled by a hippo when fetching water. The two are still held at Kilembe hospital over unpaid bills amounting to 2.9 and 4.7 million Uganda shillings respectively.
- There were no cages for fetching water and watering animals at Katunguru landing site - Kasese side, to protect people from attacks by wildlife.
- The damage assessment team in cases involving wildlife destruction of property or human life, just as is the case with the committee that determines the 20% royalties from Park collections, does not include community representatives to represent the interests of the affected communities.
- On the other hand, UWA blames the Kasese District Local government for delaying submissions of plans with which to implement the activities financed by the 20% royalties released to the communities. This was reported to be responsible for the delayed remittance of funds to the communities by UWA.

- It was also brought to the attention of community members that those who have the capacity were allowed to put electric fences around their gardens, provided they sought the guidance of UWA to expedite the fencing.
- UWA further reported that even though there were efforts to sensitize the community against illegal access to the park, the community members would not listen but continue to trespass on the national park areas.

The Intra-Ethnic Conflicts

Following the analysis of 2020 and the subsequent review of 2021, there hasn't been any significant change on the intra-ethnic conflict issues among the Basongora over loyalty to the cultural institutions. The conflict of loyalty with the two dimensions: those who are opposed to the establishment/existence of Busongora Kingdom and those who are in support of the establishment of the cultural institution/kingdom; the second one is that opposed to the current leadership, but would rather have another person as king.

Besides, the issues of occupancy and access to part of the Kabukero East land remain contentious as measures to halt unpermitted activities on the same land remain violated. Land management systems among the Basongora impede individual development e.g. Muhumuza cooperative society owns 80% of the land in Nyakatonzi while only 20% is titled for individual owners. The communal land ownership was reported to be a challenge to some Basongora in Nyakatonzi who would like to engage in intensive farming methods for their personal development.

In Basongora communities generally, there was reported disagreements between people who were in support of fencing the land for improved farming practices and those opposed to land fencing in the cattle keeping communities.

Domestic & Inter-Personal Conflicts

The level of domestic violence was said to be high in Kasese and the following were pointed out during the review:

- Family conflicts over estate management, especially after the death of the head of the household. Widows were discriminated against and mistreated by the family of the deceased husbands.
- Women were reportedly battered by their husbands who forcefully sold the products of the harvests and took the money to buy alcohol while the children's school fees was left unattended to.
- Defilement and early marriages were reported to be very high, unfortunately, some of them were allegedly condoned by the parents. It was reported that the recent UNFP report ranked Kasese as third highest in the country over child marriages, coming after Kampala and Wakiso districts.

The Inter-Ethnic Conflicts

Whereas there were fairly perceived inter-ethnic conflicts between the Basongora and the Bakonzo during the 2020 assessment, a lot of improvements seem to have happened since. In some cases the situation seems to have been considerably turned around while in other cases there are still simmering inter-ethnic brawls.

In Nyakatonzi Sub-county for instance, the political administration set up inter-ethnic committees to handle inter-community conflicts at the village level. This has seen the formerly persistent conflicts between the cultivators and cattle keepers considerably go down. On the other hand, the following low-intensity conflicts are still existent:

- Poor relations between Basongora landlords and non-Basongora tenants in Nsinungi, in Hima Town Council. This is mainly as a result of the hesitancy by some cattle keepers to fence their grazing lands, which enables cows stray to the gardens.
- There are organized cattle thefts in Hima allegedly orchestrated by the Basongora youth from the area but they slaughter them from the foothills of the mountains, intended to paint a negative picture on the Bakonzo who dwell in the mountain. This implies there are potentially strained relations between the two ethnic groups which are fanned by various actors.
- There were also reported deliberate grazing of cows by Basongora herdsmen on crops of non-Basongora cultivators. It was alleged this is done to frustrate the cultivators so that they stop growing crops in cattle keeping communities. This eventually fuels inter-ethnic conflicts over the varying livelihood practices.
- There was reported increased migration of the Bakonzo from the mountains to the areas of Hima during the planting and harvesting season as they seek for manual labour employment. During this period, cases of theft were also reported to be high, thus bringing about bad blood between the Bakonzo and other neighbouring ethnic communities who become suspects of the thieving habits.

The Land Issues

Whereas in the 2020 analysis the prominent land issues were the Basongora land management initiatives and the Kabukero issue in Karusandara Sub-county; during this review, more land issues, involving UWA and other stakeholders, besides those which previously featured came up thus:

- Land management/ownership in cattle keeping communities of the Basongora remains unsatisfactory to some of the community members who prefer practicing intensive farming on individually managed pieces of land.
- The land boundaries between the community and UWA at Katunguru and Kahendero fishing villages were reportedly not clear to the residents, and this caused discomfort among the community members. At Katunguru for example, it was alleged that UWA has persistently shifted land boundaries inching closer to the community while at Kahendero, it was alleged that UWA claimed some of the latrines and grave yards were within the National park, not within the community confines.
- It was reported that much as the land conflict in Rweiingo had been settled in court, there were some stakeholders in the case that had not yet consented to the terms of the settlement, thus making it a contentious issue.
- There was an issue of concern whereby the Basongora who benefited from the distribution of land given to those that had been displaced from the National Park. Different acreage of land was apportioned from Prisons land, particularly, the 5300 acres, part of which is the contentious Kabukero land, do not have their exact boundaries known to the beneficiaries. This lack of clarity on the boundaries is thought to be responsible for the recurring conflicts over this stretch of land where some people are denied access and use, yet more continue to come from different areas and settle on the same disputed piece of land.
- The Kasese district local government was reported to be nonresponsive to the cries of the people of Kabukero over the land conflicts that are persistent in their area. It was reported that even when the RDC had written an instruction that no activities should take place on the land, the local authorities did not enforce the directive as some people continued to construct houses while others cultivated on the piece of land.
- The community members of Kahendero fishing village desire to have more land allocated to them preferably between the community and the national park where they could plant trees for environmental conservation and bees rearing so as to keep the wild animals fairly distant from the community. It was reported that this kind of land space was not available to them as some of their houses were claimed to be within the national park boundary demarcation UWA.

The Political Issues

The political issues seem to have been largely magnified within the last three years. Whereas the previous issues were mainly about the park royalties to the community and the effect of the change of guard of the fishing management committees, the current issues of contention are much wider. The following were what were pointed out during the review:

- The issue of affirmative action to include more numbers of Indigenous Minority Groups representatives in local administrative circles, particularly at the district level, still remains unattended to.
- The issue of new district boundary demarcation to go by the Bwera-Kasese-Fort Portal road, not cutting through the mountain and low-land areas remains the contention of the low land dwellers, who are predominantly indigenous minority groups remains of interest to them and they want it continuously voiced out.
- The provision of social services to the Basongora communities remains low. For example, it was reported that Nyakatonzi Sub-county which is supposed to have a Health Center III, only has a Health Centre II, which is also ill-equipped.
- Government programs such as Operation Wealth Creation (OWC), NAADs and UWEPA have not been accessed by the communities which participated in this review. This was reported to create discontent among the community members who perceive this as a deliberate marginalization from the government, especially at the district level. This is somehow thought to fan interethnic conflicts where those in authority at the district level are perceived to be from ethnic identities that are not friendly to the Basongora and other minority groups.
- It was reported that there was a tendency by civil servants to usurp the political powers in handling of park royalties at both the determination and monitoring processes. Besides, the process was reported not to be transparent enough to involve all the relevant stakeholders. This was considered a conflict trigger between the civic and political actors within the district.
- The government has not come clear on the ownership and boundaries of the stretch of land in Kabukero which separates the cultivators of Kabukero West from the cattle keepers of Kabukero East. This has perpetuated conflicts between the two communities over land access and usage.
- The people who were affected by the landslides have not been resettled by the government for a long time and this is causing discontent. Besides, there was a reported crack in the earth nearby the Kahendero community and people live around the area were worried that the land where they are currently residing could get submerged anytime.

RECOMMENDATIONS

UWA should:

- Install cages to provide safety for the people fetching water and domestic animals' drinking points at Katunguru-Kasese and Kahendero landing sites as the absence of cages leaves them susceptible to harm by wildlife, especially crocodiles and Hippos.
- Complete the electric fencing around the national park, specifically, the stretch from KCCL to Karusandara and Rukoki Sub-counties to block the animals which are using it as an opening to invade the neighbouring communities.
- The land boundaries separating the National Park and the neighbouring communities, particularly around Kahendero and Katunguru, should be clearly marked in consultation with communities to avoid the potential conflict between the UWA and the communities.
- Compensate the victims that have been and continue to be affected by the wildlife, as is provided in the law.
- Translate the laws and regulations governing the park into the local languages, and make them well known to the neighbouring communities.

The government should:

- Clarify the ownership of the stretch of land in Karusandara between Kabukero East and Kabukero West. Besides, the boundaries that separate this land from the communities should also be clarified to avoid perpetual conflicts surrounding access and use of that land.
- Expedite affirmative action over inclusion of the minority groups in Kasese district in administrative and political offices so as to give them leverage for lobbying to extend services to their communities.
- The Ministry of Lands should sort out a potential land conflict in Muhokya where it was alleged that Busongora Cattle keepers Association claims ownership of a specific chunk of land excluding the rest of the community members from access and use.
- The land fund should compensate the squatters on the late Amon Bazira's land in Muhokya so that they can resettle in another place or pay the administrator of the estate so that he can let the squatters stay on the land as a strategy to resolve the conflict.
- Compensate the victims of River Nyamwamba floods and continue regular de-silting so as to avoid further victimization of its neighbours.
- Revitalize the community policing committees and ensure that the Police community Liaison Officer reaches out to the communities regularly. This will

improve the security situation and enhance cooperation between the communities and other security agencies due to regular updates.

- ➔ Improve on agricultural extension services to the communities, train the community members on good methods of farming and ensure that they benefit from government programs such as Operation Wealth Creation.
- ➔ Ensure that the organs determining the 20% royalties have community representation, and let the communities feel the economic value of the National Park.

Civil society should:

- ➔ Play an intermediary role between government and UWA on the one hand and with the community on the other hand. Their engagement would be in form of advocacy and mediation over the various conflicts.
- ➔ Conduct training on family planning for both men and women as well as campaigns to combat early marriages in the communities.
- ➔ In conjunction with UWA and community development office, help the community members to understand the laws and regulations governing the Park, as well as other laws that concern their daily undertakings.
- ➔ Organize Radio talk shows and community Barazas involving the

district, UWA, NGOs and the communities over issues that cause conflict.

- ➔ Engage Parliamentarians on advocacy and awareness issues so as to alleviate misguided blame against UWA and other institutions.
- ➔ Strengthen the early warning infrastructure and strengthen the capacity of peace ambassadors to engage with other stakeholders for referrals.

The community should:

- ➔ Organize and participate in regular community meetings to deliberate on various issues affecting them such as learning about the law.
- ➔ Plant woodlots that would provide them with firewood so that they do not have to risk going to the park for firewood collection.
- ➔ Victims of conflict should seek for pro-bono services from Justice Centres and Legal Aid Project which offer free legal services to help them access Justice in cases that it would be costly. They should engage Peace ambassadors to obtain contacts of such pro bono service providers.
- ➔ Establish apiary projects in areas where communities border the National Park so as to scare off wild animals, especially the elephants and alternatively obtain another livelihood source.
- ➔ Seek legal/ expert advice on legal issues concerning will writing, estate/property management and conflict resolution.

CONCLUSION

The review established that there have been improvements in the aspect of inter-ethnic conflicts as well as intra-ethnic conflicts. The formation of inter-ethnic committees in Nyakatonzi to address conflict issues, especially relating to their livelihoods, have helped a great deal in bringing down inter-ethnic conflicts. The continued ignorance of the park management laws and regulation is quite dangerous for the community and UWA relations. When relations between UWA and the community are improved through mutual and regular engagement, it will make a great deal of difference, and peaceful coexistence will be realized in the area.

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