

EARTHSCAN CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT SERIES



CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN UGANDA

EDITED BY
**CHRIS SANDBROOK,
CONNOR JOSEPH CAVANAGH AND
DAVID MWESIGYE TUMUSIIME**

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Conservation and Development in Uganda

Uganda has extensive protected areas and iconic wildlife (including mountain gorillas), which exist within a complex social and political environment. In recent years Uganda has been seen as a test bed and model case study for numerous and varied approaches to address complex and connected conservation and development challenges. This volume reviews and assesses these initiatives, collecting new research and analyses both from emerging scholars and well-established academics in Uganda and around the globe. Approaches covered range from community-based conservation to the more recent proliferation of neoliberalised interventions based on markets and payments for ecosystem services.

Drawing on insights from political ecology, human geography, institutional economics, and environmental science, the authors explore the challenges of operationalising truly sustainable forms of development in a country whose recent history is characterised by a highly volatile governance and development context. They highlight the stakes for vulnerable human populations in relation to large and growing socioeconomic inequalities, as well as for Uganda's rich, unique, and globally significant biodiversity. They illustrate the conflicts that occur between competing claims of conservation, agriculture, tourism, and the energy and mining industries. Crucially, the book draws out lessons that can be learned from the Ugandan experience for conservation and development practitioners and scholars around the world.

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 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

earthscan
from Routledge

First published 2018
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A catalog record has been requested for this book

ISBN: 978-1-138-71092-4 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-315-20053-8 (ebk)

Typeset in Sabon
by Swales & Willis Ltd, Exeter, Devon, UK

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Acknowledgements

This book has been many years in the making, and would not have been possible without the help and support of many people and organisations.

First, we thank those who have provided funding for the work that has gone into this book. Bringing decades of knowledge together into one volume for the benefit of Ugandan people and institutions was a central aim of this whole book project, and we are profoundly grateful for the funding that has assisted us in making progress towards this goal. The Cambridge Africa Partnership for Research Excellence (CAPREx), which is funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the ALBORADA Trust and the Isaac Newton Trust, generously funded an authors' workshop in Kampala early in the project, which allowed us to bring together most of the Ugandan contributors to the book, along with a few others from further afield. This was immensely useful in setting the direction for the collection and ensuring that we had the right people involved and topics covered. They have also kindly agreed to fund a book launch event in Kampala. The Department of International Environment and Development Studies (Noragric) at the Norwegian University of Life Sciences (NMBU) generously provided funding to allow us to purchase a number of copies of the book for free distribution to key actors in Uganda. Also, NMBU provided an international leave mobility grant that allowed the second co-editor (Connor J. Cavanagh) to visit the Cambridge Conservation Initiative and Department of Geography, University of Cambridge, in 2016, which greatly facilitated collaboration at a crucial early stage of the writing process.

We thank all those who have contributed to the quality of the work contained within this volume. Tim Hardwick and Amy Johnston at Routledge were kind enough to accept our proposal, and have been helpful at every step of the process (including allowing us to miss a few deadlines). Bill Adams, as editor of the book series, provided excellent advice at the proposal stage. Ivan Scales, lead editor of a former book in the series, also provided very helpful advice on how to manage the editorial process. Abwoli Banana, Pål Vedeld, and Jon Geir Petursson provided sage advice at various critical junctures, drawing on their decades of academic and consultancy experience in Uganda and East Africa. Lisa Naughton provided

some very useful ideas that we drew on in Chapters 1 and 13. In Uganda, Runyararo Jolyn Rukarwa provided valuable advice on how to handle the editorial process and gave useful views on the content of several of the book chapters. Mnason Tweheyo – Dean, School of Forestry, Environmental and Geographical Sciences at Makerere University – generously supported the printing of chapter drafts. We would particularly like to thank all the lead and co-authors of the chapters for their hard work. They are a wonderful group representing probably hundreds of years of relevant collective experience in Uganda, and we feel very lucky and proud to have brought their work together in this volume. Along the way we have chased some of them mercilessly, and we thank them for their patience and cooperation!

Finally, we would like to thank our close friends and family for putting up with all the field trips, phone calls and late nights that have gone into this book. We are immensely grateful, and hope the sacrifice has been worth it.

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Part I

Introduction



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1 Dynamics of uneven conservation and development in Uganda

*Connor Joseph Cavanagh, Chris Sandbrook,
and David Mwesigye Tumusiime*

Introduction

On the 15th of August 2006, former Executive Director of the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) Moses Mapesa published an op-ed piece in one of Uganda's leading daily newspapers, the *New Vision*, entitled '[President] Museveni's defence of wildlife is good news'. Mapesa's article was intended to bolster public support for the country's forest and wildlife conservation agencies in the aftermath of a controversial eviction of refugee Basongora pastoralists from Queen Elizabeth National Park. In short, Mapesa's (2006, p. 2) argument in support of these and similar evictions was both straightforward and compelling. As he put it:

To illustrate the importance of wildlife and its contribution to the national economy, I will use the gorilla, buffalo and elephant. Every individual gorilla in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park earns Uganda US \$100,000 (sh180m) per year and creates employment for 30 people. Which individual Ugandan living near a National Park can raise that amount of money? Each buffalo contributes \$20,000 (sh36m) and elephant \$30,000 (sh54m). None of our indigenous livestock or even cross breeds livestock can contribute that much. A cow producing 20 litres of milk per day would yield at most only sh11m, all factors held constant.

Notably, Mapesa's position here was not merely that conservation must be pursued because of the intrinsic value of Uganda's storied flora and fauna, but rather because of their increasingly valuable contribution to national processes of economic growth and development. Associated evictions, then, were ostensibly not a matter of state prejudice against 'squatters' or 'encroachers' within protected areas, but simply rather a matter of prudence and concern for both sustainability and prosperity at the national scale.

From the perspective of contributions to state coffers and the gross domestic product, the logic of this position would to some perhaps seem beyond reproach. Today, Uganda reports a GDP per capita of approximately 615 US dollars, and nearly a quarter of the population lives below the 'poverty

headcount ratio' of \$1.90 per day (World Bank, 2018). Conversely, the tourism sector – which continues to be dominated by conservation-related wildlife ecotourism – contributes an estimated nine percent of Ugandan GDP (Kamukama, 2016), and is currently projected to grow at a rate of at least 7 percent per annum until 2027 (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2017). In this context, it seems unlikely that many evictees from the country's protected areas would have retained much hope of economically outperforming a buffalo – much less a mountain gorilla – had they remained in place.

The zoologist S.K. Eltringham (1994) once questioned whether wildlife might reasonably be expected to 'pay its own way' in the face of alternative – and potentially more lucrative – land uses. Although mountain gorillas might indeed contribute US \$100,000 per year to Uganda's economy, many other forms of 'non-charismatic' flora and fauna in other parts of the country stand to 'earn' far less. Moreover, an equally pressing question today seems to be whether rural Ugandan *citizens* can 'pay their own way', or contribute sufficiently to national economic growth in order to avoid being displaced by either conservation or, similarly, more profitable forms of land and resource utilization.

In this sense, the contemporary geographies of conservation in Uganda – much like the geographies of 'development' more broadly (e.g., Smith, 1984) – are increasingly both uneven and dynamic, and it is both this unevenness and this dynamism that many of the contributions to the present volume address. Notably, these geographies of conservation are determined not only by the intrinsic value of diverse flora and fauna, but also by their variable economic appraisal and valuation in relation to a range of competing interests and land uses. These range from subsistence agriculture, foraging, and pastoralism, to artisanal or small-scale resource extraction, to lucrative oil and mineral developments. Hence, whilst thousands of rural Ugandans have faced eviction from various forest reserves and national parks over the last several decades (National Forestry Authority, 2011), conservationists themselves have also experienced a degree of relative 'displacement' in some instances. Here, notable cases include oil extraction within Murchison Falls National Park and Queen Elizabeth National Park (MacKenzie et al., 2017; Byakagaba et al., this volume, Chapter 12), as well as in other protected areas found within western Uganda's oil- and mineral-rich Albertine Graben (Wildlife Conservation Society, 2018). Consequently, one of the principal aims of this book is to explore and assess the implications, stakes, and consequences of such variable economic, political, and social (re)valuations for both conservation and development outcomes in the country.

Conservation and (sustainable) development: opportunities, challenges, and trade-offs

It is generally not disputed that conservation efforts of some kind are both warranted and urgently necessary in many of Uganda's rich and diverse

ecosystems, notwithstanding important debates about the character, performance, and (in)justices of actual conservation practices in the country (e.g., Nel and Hill, 2013; Cavanagh and Benjaminsen, 2014; Lyons and Westoby, 2014). The territory now known as Uganda is effectively an intersection of several major African biomes, denoting that it hosts the wide array of flora and fauna associated with each of these.¹ Ugandan flora and fauna populate often-spectacular landscapes that range from the snow-capped Rwenzori mountains, to the vast Lake Victoria, to extinct volcanoes such as Mount Elgon or savannah and dryland ecosystems in the country's north. Consequently, recent estimates posit – to take just two examples – that approximately 7.5 percent of mammals and 10.2 percent of bird species currently recognized are present within Uganda, despite its relatively small size at only about 0.18 percent of the Earth's terrestrial and freshwater surface (USAID, 2006). The country is also home to 159 threatened species on the IUCN Red List, including '38 plants, 21 mammals, 18 birds, 6 amphibians, 54 fishes, 10 molluscs and 12 [. . .] other invertebrates' (Republic of Uganda, 2016, p. 14), as well as more than half of the world's remaining population of some 900 mountain gorillas or *Gorilla beringei beringei*.

In an effort to halt the loss of biodiversity and conserve existing species richness, large swathes of Uganda's terrestrial surface have been placed under the protection of two national conservation agencies – the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) and the National Forestry Authority (NFA) – as well as a range of local government services (Banana et al., this volume, Chapter 2; Petursson and Vedeld, this volume, Chapter 11). The national parks, forest reserves, wildlife reserves, and other protected areas governed by these agencies number about 712, and at present encompass approximately 243,145 km² of land, or at least 16.1 percent of Uganda's surface area (UNEP-WCMC, 2018). These protected areas contain more than 30 percent of all forest in Uganda, including 1.9 million hectares of forests legally designated as the country's 'Permanent Forest Estate (PFE)'. The latter, moreover, is intended to be conserved 'in perpetuity' rather than harvested and regenerated (Ministry of Water and Environment, 2016).

Despite these measures, biodiversity continues to decline at an officially estimated rate of 10–11 percent per decade (Ministry of Water, Lands, and Environment, 2003), and deforestation processes appear to continue unabated in some parts of the country. For instance, Pomeroy et al. (2017) maintain that Uganda lost nearly half of its biodiversity value between 1975 and 1995. This is thought to largely be due to political instability and subsequent governance challenges associated with the authoritarian regimes of Presidents Idi Amin and Milton Obote, as well as the civil war that brought current President Yoweri Museveni to power in 1986 (Turyahabwe and Banana, 2008). Although the effectiveness of conservation governance has since improved in relative terms, the situation is highly variable across different regions of the country, where hotspots of deforestation and ecosystem degradation apparently remain intransigent. As Jeary et al.

(this volume, Chapter 10) note, this is not unrelated to the fact that agriculture contributes nearly a quarter of GDP and almost 70 percent of employment in rural Ugandan households, denoting that there are nearly always potential trade-offs between conservation and agricultural land uses.

Recent efforts to conserve biodiversity in Uganda must still be understood in the context of the country's highly tumultuous governance and development history. This is marked by long periods of civil war and authoritarian rule (Kasozi, 1994); insurgencies by the Lord's Resistance Army in the north (Dunn, 2004) and the Allied Democratic Forces in the Rwenzori borderlands (Titeca and Vlassenroot, 2012); extra-territorial military engagements in South Sudan, Somalia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (Clark, 2001; Fisher, 2012); and a domestic stance on democracy and human rights that has variously won Uganda's government both admiration and admonition from Western countries and civil society organisations (e.g., Dicklitch and Lwanga, 2003; Boyd, 2013). The governance of many sectors, including conservation, is also influenced by ongoing processes of decentralisation across Uganda, which have seen the number of districts (the largest sub-national administrative unit) increase from only 16 in 1959 to more than 121 as of 2018 (Ministry of Local Government, 2018). Each of these districts understandably retains its own unique political *milieu*, with both local politicians and conservationists influenced to varying extents by the interests of local citizens, businesses, and civil society organisations.

Contemporary development policy also simultaneously promotes the growth of ecologically deleterious forms of extractive industry in Uganda and the rise of large-scale commercial agribusiness. However, prevailing environment and development policies continue to frame rural *communities* as perhaps the most pressing threat to both protected areas and ecosystems more generally. Such a conceptualisation owes much to neo-Malthusian concerns about population growth, and is both explicitly and implicitly enshrined at the highest levels of the country's economic and social development institutions. For instance, alongside neighbouring Kenya's national *Vision 2030* strategy and Rwanda's *Vision 2050* (see Mosley and Watson, 2016), Uganda's *Vision 2040* aspires to 'a transformed Ugandan society from a peasant to a modern and prosperous country', and one that enjoys 'sustainable wealth, employment, and inclusive growth'. Here, growing populations of impoverished 'peasants' and other rural communities are associated with high levels of natural resource dependence, and such dependence is in turn associated with increased demand for or strain upon land and protected natural resources. As a recent assessment from the National Environmental Management Agency (2016, p. 57) succinctly puts it, the 'high population growth rate has increased demand for resources from the protected areas for agriculture leading to encroachment on tourism areas; increased illegal activities especially poaching; and increased human-wildlife interface leading to conflicts'. In short, all of these factors are perceived as threatening to conservation efforts for both biophysical and economic reasons.

Conversely, efforts toward some iteration of sustainable development in the country are still urgently necessary. Indeed, the United Nations Development Programme's (2016) Human Development Index currently ranks Uganda in 163rd place out of 188 nations, denoting that the country is 'tied' in this assessment with Haiti, and is only one place above the war-stricken Republic of Sudan. Life expectancy at birth, although improving, is still only 59.2 years, and Ugandan children on average receive only 5.7 years of formal education (ibid). Similarly, the official deforestation rate is 1.8 percent per annum, again allegedly due primarily to a rapidly growing population, high rates of rural poverty, and widespread dependence upon natural resources for energy, building materials, and other basic needs (National Forestry Authority, 2011). In response, the Government of Uganda has now committed itself formally to a 'green growth' development strategy, one that aims to simultaneously 'deliver inclusive economic and social outcomes while protecting natural capital, addressing climate change, creating jobs and accelerating economic growth' (see Republic of Uganda, 2017, p. 8).

Key to this latter strategy is improving access to education and vocational training so as to diversify 'peasant' and other rural livelihoods into a range of professions that are not as closely tied to the exploitation of the natural resource base. Yet the construal of these livelihoods as at once both anti-modern and unsustainable links contemporary 'green' development policies with a long tradition of fundamentally colonial tropes and narratives (see also Adams, 2009). These often consist – as Benjamin Gardner (2017, p. 1) recently put it – of Westerners and other 'modern' elites ostensibly 'saving African wildlife [and flora] while also saving Africans from themselves'. The voices of ordinary Ugandans are indeed often conspicuously absent from most national plans and policies for protecting biodiversity, reversing deforestation, and facilitating 'green growth' in the country. The fact remains, however, that the agency of rural communities throughout East Africa has in practice often subverted the grand ambitions of colonial and post-colonial initiatives for conservation and economic development (Bunker, 1987; Feierman, 1990; MacKenzie, 1998; Anderson, 2002; Cavanagh and Benjaminsen, 2015). It is precisely this occasional incongruence between vision and execution – or between discourse and practice (Benjaminsen and Svarstad, 2010) – in conservation and development initiatives that many of the contributions to this volume examine in great detail.

The contribution of this book

As the discussion above makes clear, Uganda has an important story to tell about the often problematic intertwining of conservation and development agendas. Fortunately, many researchers have investigated aspects of this story and published their work in a wide range of both scholarly and more popular outlets. However, there has been a notable lack of any attempt to

bring the different threads of Uganda's conservation and development story together in one place. Consequently, writings on environment and development in Uganda have occasionally spoken *past* rather than directly *to* the extant literature on the same geographical-empirical context, arguably limiting progress in the state of knowledge on these themes. In turn, this has somewhat impeded the emergence of a coherent knowledge base for use by practitioners and policymakers in government, multilateral organisations, and donor agencies.

This volume seeks to address this gap. In offering the first book-length treatment of conservation and development issues in Uganda, it seeks to achieve three main goals. First, the book collects together the work of a range of Ugandan and international scholars, from multiple disciplines, and creates a platform for their work to be considered as part of a common enterprise. Second, it offers a single reference point on conservation and development in Uganda, hopefully reducing the future risk of researchers missing the important work of those in whose footsteps they follow. Finally, by bringing many of the threads of the story together, it enables previously somewhat latent or implicit connections between conservation and development processes to be explicitly highlighted at multiple scales, allowing for an enhanced and enriched understanding of the co-evolution of conservation and development processes, as well as trade-offs between them.

Outline of the book

The book proceeds in five parts and 13 chapters, which introduce and analyse multiple sites across Uganda (Figure 1.1).

In the remainder of the introductory **Part I**, Banana et al. (Chapter 2) offer critical historical context to contemporary environment and development challenges in Uganda by outlining the evolution of institutions for forest and wildlife conservation in the country. In doing so, they focus on both continuities and discontinuities between the colonial (1896–1963), early post-colonial (1963–1986), and contemporary periods (1986–present) of conservation governance. Each of these periods has been marked by significant shifts in terms of the objectives, structure, and intended beneficiaries of conservation institutions. Yet, despite these fluctuations, the chapter draws particular attention to the ways in which monitoring and enforcement has constituted a recurring problem regardless of the specific set of institutions and policy objectives in place, and relates these challenges to the governance of Uganda's contemporary protected area estate.

Concluding **Part I**, Twinamatsiko et al. (Chapter 3) provide an overview of the crucial role of explicitly *integrated* conservation and development projects and policies in Uganda. Drawing on the authors' wealth of firsthand experience, the chapter reviews the history of such activities in Uganda from their earliest days, revealing how they were first developed and then spread around the country, and some of the successes and challenges associated