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AWF Rwanda Program Report **2020-2025**



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Acronyms and Abbreviations

ACRONYM	Full Term	ACRONYM	Full Term
ABSAP	Africa Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan	KPI	Key Performance Indicator
ACBA	Africa's Civil Society Biodiversity Alliance	KYBN	Kenya Youth Biodiversity Network
ALU	African Leadership University	LMP	Labor Management Procedures
APAD	Africa Protected Areas Directors	LUP	Land Use Plan
APAC	Africa Protected Areas Congress	M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
A-PACT	Africa Protected Areas Conservation Trust	MoE	Ministry of Environment
AWF	African Wildlife Foundation	MSD	Market Systems Development
AWLF	African Wildlife Leadership Foundation (AWF's Former Name)	NBSAP	National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan
AYSB	African Youth Summit on Biodiversity	NBS	Nature-Based Solutions
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity	NDC	Nationally Determined Contribution
CBT	Community-Based Tourism	NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
CIB	Conservation Investment Blueprint	PES	Payment for Ecosystem Services
COP	Conference of the Parties	PWD	Persons with Disabilities
CSA	Climate-Smart Agriculture	Q1/Q2/Q3/Q4	Quarter 1/2/3/4 (of fiscal year)
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility	RAP	Resettlement Action Plan
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo	RDB	Rwanda Development Board
EAC	East African Community	REMA	Rwanda Environment Management Authority
ESIA	Environmental and Social Impact Assessment	RICa	Rwanda Institute for Conservation Agriculture
ESCP	Environmental and Social Commitment Plan	RPF	Resettlement Policy Framework
ESS	Environmental and Social Standards	RWF	Rwandan Franc
EU	European Union	RYAF	Rwanda Youth Agriculture Forum
FGD	Focus Group Discussion	RYBN	Rwanda Youth Biodiversity Network
FLR	Forest Landscape Restoration	RYOD	Rwanda Youth Organization and Development
FONERWA	Rwanda Green Fund	RYAO	Rwanda Youth Organization in Action
FY	Fiscal Year	SADC	Southern African Development Community
GAP	Gender and Anti-Gender-Based Violence Action Plan	SBSTTA	Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice
GBF	Global Biodiversity Framework	SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
GGCRS	Green Growth and Climate Resilience Strategy	SEP	Stakeholder Engagement Plan
GIS	Geographic Information System	SMART	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound
GLF	Global Landscapes Forum	SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats
GoR	Government of Rwanda	TGP	The Green Protector
GRM	Grievance Redress Mechanism	ToC	Theory of Change
GVTC	Greater Virunga Transboundary Collaboration	TRACK	Strategic Performance Monitoring Platform
GYBN	Global Youth Biodiversity Network	TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
HWC	Human-Wildlife Conflict	USD	United States Dollar
IPLCs	Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities	VCA	Volcanoes Community Association
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature	VNP	Volcanoes National Park
JADF	Joint Action Development Forum	VNPL	Volcanoes National Park Landscape
KII	Key Informant Interview		
KMGBF	Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework		

A Message from the Country Coordinator

BUILDING RESILIENCE THROUGH PARTNERSHIP AND INTEGRATION



Dear Partners, Stakeholders, and Friends of Conservation,
As I reflect on the journey we have undertaken this year in the Volcanoes National Park landscape, I am struck by a singular truth: Resilience is not built in isolation; it is forged through integration, partnership, and an unwavering commitment to both people and nature.

The year 2025 has been defined by this theme of resilience through integration. In one of the world's most densely populated regions, where mountain gorillas find their last refuge and human communities face mounting pressures from poverty and climate change, we have witnessed firsthand the power of bringing conservation and development together as mutually reinforcing forces.

THE UNIQUE CONVERGENCE: Our Operating Context

Volcanoes National Park stands at a critical juncture. The conservation success story of the endangered mountain gorilla, a global icon of hope, has led to a thriving population that now demands expanded habitat. Yet the park has already lost 53% of its original size, hemmed in by some of the highest population densities on the continent.

The communities surrounding this precious landscape face their own challenges: persistent poverty, limited economic opportunities, and the growing impacts of climate change, manifesting as floods, landslides, and soil erosion.

Human-wildlife conflict is not merely a conservation challenge here. It is a daily reality for families whose crops feed gorillas as readily as they feed their children. These are not competing interests to be managed; they are interconnected challenges that demand integrated solutions.

OUR STRATEGIC RESOLVE: A Model for Africa

In partnership with the Government of Rwanda, the African Wildlife Foundation is developing an innovative model that positions **ecosystem conservation as the driving force behind poverty alleviation and green growth.**

This is not conservation despite development, nor development at the expense of nature. This is a rights-based approach that recognizes local communities as essential partners, indeed, as the primary stewards of their natural heritage. Through the comprehensive Conservation and Development Master Plan completed in March 2024, we have created a spatial blueprint that demonstrates how gorilla habitat can expand while simultaneously creating sustainable livelihoods.

Our restoration of 27 hectares with over 28,000 indigenous plants is already providing habitat that mountain gorillas are utilizing.

Our business incubation program, launched in partnership with Inkomoko, is equipping 132 entrepreneurs with the skills and capital to build conservation-compatible enterprises. The new Volcanoes Community Association Horticulture Hub is creating stable employment while demonstrating the economic viability of high-value agriculture.

These are not isolated projects; they are integrated components of a single, cohesive strategy.

ALIGNMENT WITH RWANDA'S VISION

Our mission in Rwanda directly serves the nation's broader development aspirations. This program is fundamentally aligned with Vision 2050, which envisions a prosperous nation built on sustainable and inclusive economic growth. It operationalizes the Green Growth and Climate Resilience Strategy by demonstrating how natural

capital, when properly stewarded, becomes the foundation for climate adaptation and economic opportunity.

In Volcanoes National Park, we are not simply protecting endangered species. We are building a model that shows how Africa can achieve its development goals without sacrificing its irreplaceable natural heritage. We are proving that conservation can be the catalyst, not the constraint, for sustainable prosperity.

THE PATH FORWARD: A Call to Partnership

As we look toward 2030, our vision is clear: 1,000 hectares of critical habitat restored and effectively managed; 500 households empowered through sustainable livelihoods with a 30% increase in household income; \$10 million in sustainable financing mobilized; and a participatory land use plan guiding 80% of the landscape under sustainable management practices.

These are ambitious goals, but they are achievable. We have the strategy, the partnerships,

and most critically, the trust and engagement of local communities. What we need now is sustained investment and continued collaboration from partners who share our vision.

The Volcanoes landscape is more than a biodiversity hotspot it is a proving ground for a new model of African development. I invite you to join us in building this future, where mountain gorillas thrive alongside thriving communities, and where Rwanda's natural capital drives inclusive, resilient, green growth.

Sincerely,

Patrick Nsabimana
Country Coordinator,
African Wildlife Foundation
Rwanda Country Office



Crater: Mount Bisoke active volcano, Virunga Mountains, Rwanda-Congo border

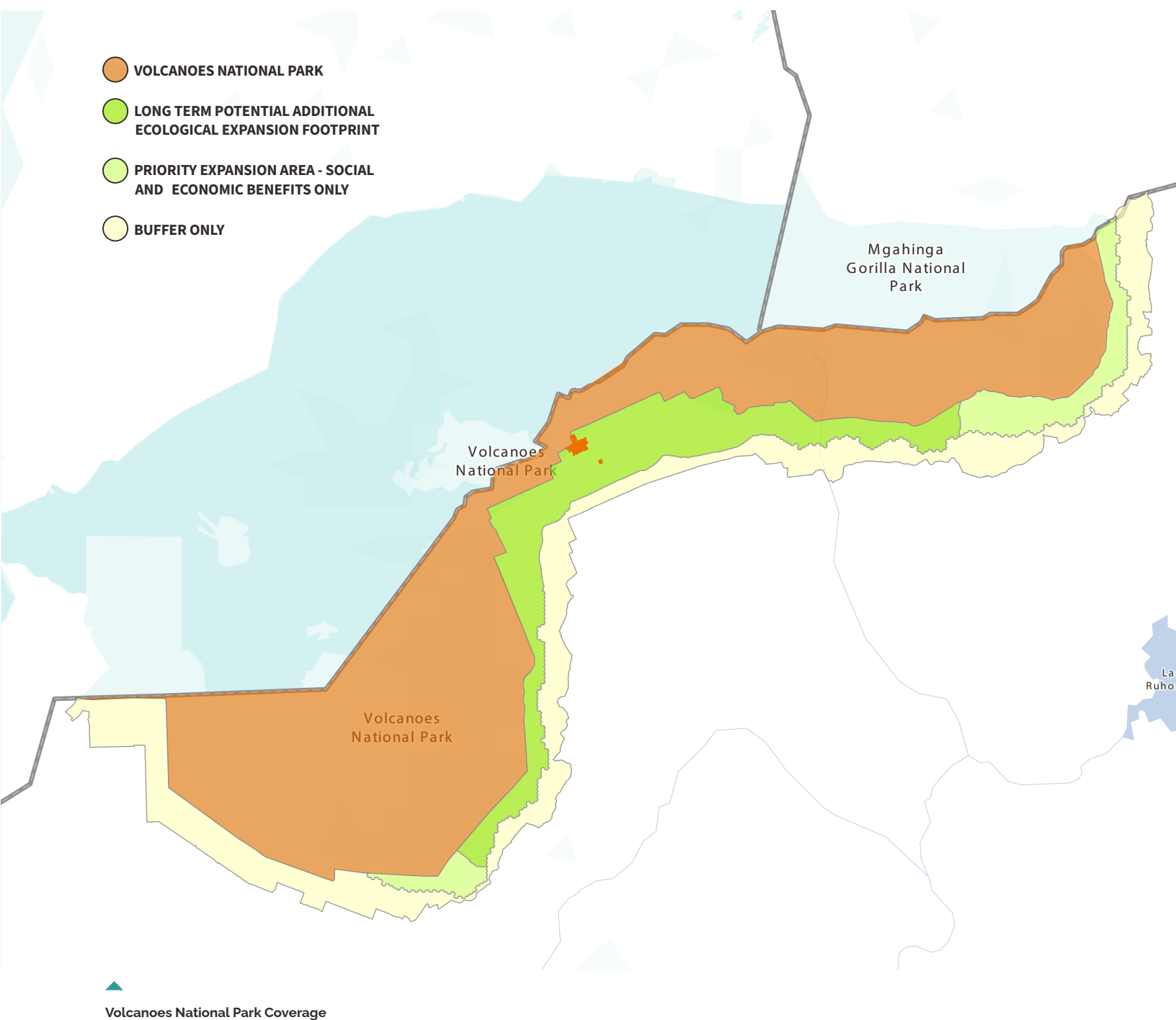
Year in Review

TRACKING PROGRESS TOWARD OUR 2030 GOALS

This dashboard provides a high-level summary of our progress against the core strategic goals established in the VNP Landscape Strategic Plan. These apex metrics demonstrate how our integrated approach is delivering measurable impact across habitat conservation, community livelihoods, landscape planning, and sustainable financing.

Strategic Goal (by 2030)	2025 Progress (cumulative)	What This Means
HABITAT EXPANSION TARGET: 1,000 Hectares Restored	27 Hectares Restored & Planted 28,000+ Native Plants	Degraded habitat within the VNP landscape is being restored and effectively managed for biodiversity conservation. Mountain gorillas are already utilizing newly planted areas, demonstrating immediate conservation value.
COMMUNITY LIVELIHOODS TARGET: 500 Households Empowered (30% income increase)	132 Entrepreneurs Trained 160 Farmers Trained	Households are benefiting from sustainable livelihood initiatives including ecotourism, agroforestry, and conservation-compatible enterprises. The Horticulture Hub launched in August 2025 has already generated RWF 5.5M in revenue, demonstrating economic viability.
INTEGRATED PLANNING TARGET: 80% of Landscape Under Sustainable Management	COMPLETED MASTER PLAN March 2024	A comprehensive participatory Land Use Plan and Conservation Investment Blueprint (CIB) was completed, providing the spatial framework and investment roadmap for balancing gorilla habitat expansion with socio-economic development across the landscape.
SUSTAINABLE FINANCE TARGET: US \$10 Million Mobilized	RWF 21.1M+ Disbursed to 32 Enterprises CIB Completed	New sustainable financing is being secured from public, private, and philanthropic sources. The Conservation Investment Blueprint translates the master plan into bankable opportunities, with initial investments already flowing to conservation-compatible enterprises.

Note: These metrics represent the foundation of our integrated approach. Subsequent sections of this report will detail the strategic framework, programmatic evidence, and partnership ecosystem that underpin this progress.



The Four Strategic Objectives: Our Organizing Framework

The VNP Landscape Strategic Plan is structured around four interconnected objectives. These objectives were developed through extensive stakeholder consultations, rigorous situational analysis, and alignment with Rwanda's national development priorities. Together, they form the backbone of our conservation and development model.

EXPAND AND REHABILITATE HABITAT FOR ENDANGERED WILDLIFE POPULATIONS

Restore degraded habitat within the VNP landscape and ensure it is effectively managed for biodiversity conservation.

TARGET:
1,000
hectares restored by 2030.

ACHIEVE INTEGRATED CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT OUTCOMES

Develop and implement coordinated landscape-level planning that ensures conservation and development are mutually reinforcing.

TARGET:
Participatory land use plan adopted with 80% of landscape under sustainable management by 2030.

DIVERSIFY INCOMES, EXPAND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES, AND BUILD BUSINESS SKILLS

Ensure communities benefit from sustainable livelihood initiatives including ecotourism, agroforestry, and conservation-compatible enterprises.

TARGET:
500
households empowered with 30% income increase by 2030.

MOBILIZE SUSTAINABLE FINANCING AND RESOURCING MECHANISMS

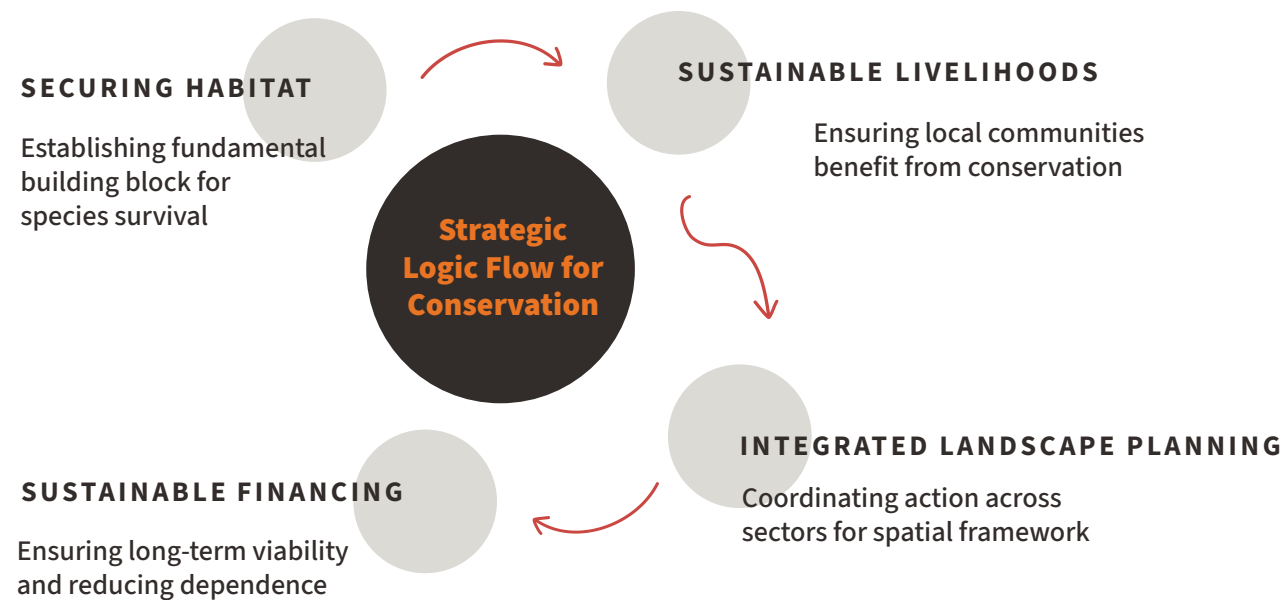
Secure diverse, long-term funding streams for conservation and community development initiatives.

TARGET:
\$10M
mobilized from public, private, and philanthropic sources by 2030.

THE CAUSAL LOGIC: HOW OUR OBJECTIVES WORK TOGETHER

These four objectives are not independent pillars; they are interconnected components of a single integrated system. The strategic plan demonstrates a clear causal logic:

THE STRATEGIC LOGIC FLOW



OBJECTIVE 1

EXPAND AND REHABILITATE HABITAT FOR ENDANGERED WILDLIFE

STRATEGIC GOAL

By 2030, restore and effectively manage 1,000 hectares of degraded habitat within the VNP landscape for biodiversity conservation and ecosystem services

FRAMING THE CHALLENGE: A PARK UNDER PRESSURE

Volcanoes National Park has lost 53% of its original size, shrinking from its historic boundaries to accommodate human settlement in one of Africa's most densely populated regions.

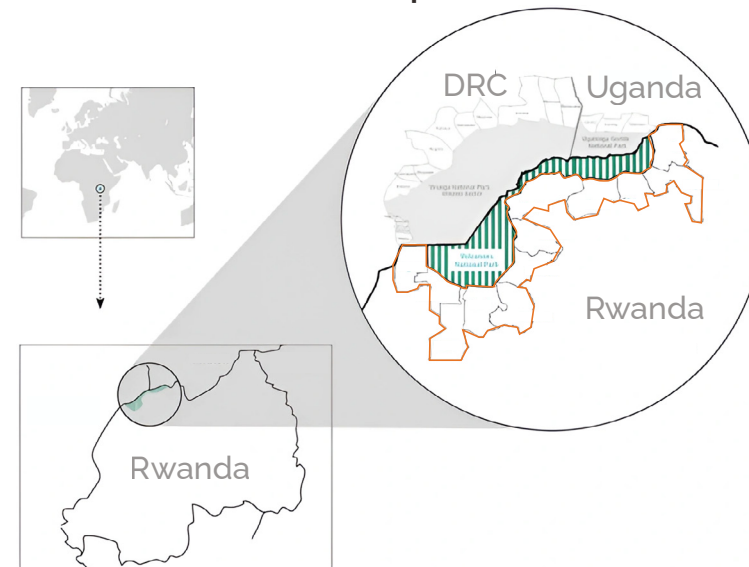
Yet the park's conservation success, particularly the recovery of the mountain gorilla population, now demands that this trend be reversed. The growing gorilla population requires expanded habitat. Human-wildlife conflict, particularly crop raiding, creates mounting tension as wildlife and human spaces increasingly overlap.

Habitat expansion is not merely a conservation imperative; it is essential for reducing conflict, securing ecosystem services (water, climate regulation), and demonstrating that conservation can coexist with development in high-density landscapes.

OUR ACTIONS: STRATEGIC INTERVENTIONS FOR HABITAT RECOVERY

AWF's approach to habitat expansion is multi-pronged, combining direct land acquisition with ecological restoration and sustainable land management in buffer zones:

- 1. Land Acquisition Through Negotiated Agreements**
To date, AWF has acquired a total of **142.4 hectares (as of February 2026)** through voluntary, negotiated agreements with communities—comprising **92.4 hectares for Volcanoes National Park expansion and 50 hectares designated for the relocation site**. This acquisition is conducted in full compliance with Rwanda's Expropriation Law and World Bank Environmental and Social Standards, ensuring affected households receive fair compensation and resettlement support. The land acquisition process is underpinned by comprehensive social safeguards (detailed in Section V) that protect community rights and ensure equitable outcomes.
- 2. Ecological Restoration: The 27-Hectare Pilot Project**
Through partnership with the Rwanda Development Board (RDB) and EcoPlanet Bamboo Rwanda, AWF has successfully restored 27 hectares of donated land that had been added to VNP. The restoration centered on reintroducing *Yushania alpina*, an indigenous bamboo species critical to the park's ecosystem and a primary food source for mountain gorillas and golden monkeys.



3. Collaboration for Ecological Monitoring

AWF collaborates with park authorities (RDB) and research institutions to monitor ecological outcomes of habitat restoration using key indicators, including vegetation cover, species diversity, and wildlife population dynamics. This monitoring ensures adaptive management and demonstrates conservation effectiveness to partners and funders.

4. Buffer Zones: Sustainable Land Management Practices

In areas surrounding VNP, AWF promotes adoption of sustainable land management practices such as agroforestry and soil conservation measures. These practices reduce pressure on park habitats and create de facto buffer zones that support both wildlife movement and human livelihoods. The Climate-Smart Agriculture training (detailed under Objective 2) is a key component of this buffer zone strategy.

The Proof Point: Immediate Conservation Impact



27
HECTARES RESTORED



28K+
PLANTS

This 27-hectare project serves as a vital pilot for future park restoration efforts. The lessons learned, from sourcing plant materials to implementing effective planting strategies, will inform and enhance future expansion projects within VNP and potentially other protected areas in Rwanda.

Mountain Gorillas Already Utilizing Restored Areas

The success of restoration efforts became evident almost immediately. Mountain gorillas and other wildlife are already utilizing the newly planted areas, demonstrating the immediate conservation value of this work.

This quick adoption by local fauna is a testament to the careful selection of native plant species and the quality of the restoration work.



From degraded land to thriving gorilla habitat in one growing season: proof that restoration works.

OBJECTIVE 2

DIVERSIFY INCOMES AND EXPAND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

STRATEGIC GOAL

By 2030, ensure 500 households benefit from sustainable livelihood initiatives (ecotourism, agroforestry, conservation-compatible enterprises), leading to a 30% increase in average household income from 2024 baseline.

THE RATIONALE: SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS AS THE CORNERSTONE

Conservation cannot succeed if local communities bear its costs without sharing its benefits. The communities surrounding Volcanoes National Park face persistent poverty, limited economic opportunities, and heavy dependence on subsistence agriculture which puts them in direct competition with wildlife for land and resources.

Sustainable livelihoods are not an ancillary benefit of conservation; they are the foundation of the rights-based conservation model. When communities have viable economic alternatives, they become partners, not adversaries, in protecting their natural heritage.

OUR ACTIONS: BUILDING CONSERVATION-COMPATIBLE ENTERPRISES

1. Comprehensive Livelihood Assessment

AWF conducted a comprehensive assessment of current livelihood strategies, needs, and opportunities for communities in the VNP landscape, with particular focus on identifying conservation-compatible economic activities.

This assessment formed the evidence base for all subsequent livelihood interventions and is embedded in the Conservation Investment Blueprint (detailed in Section IV).

2. Business Incubation Program (Inkomoko Partnership)

In partnership with Inkomoko, AWF launched a business incubation program designed to help communities transition to climate-resilient, conservation-friendly livelihoods through sustainable enterprises.

The program provides comprehensive support including:

- **Business Plan Development:** Intensive workshops on business ideation, planning, and entrepreneurship mindset
- **Investment Readiness Training:** Modules on savings, investment requirements, and business registration
- **Market Entry Strategies:** Training on product testing, sales/marketing, and business tools
- **Personalized Coaching:** One-on-one mentoring for each entrepreneur
- **Start-up Funding: Access to capital through the Enterprise Development Fund**

3. Conservation-Compatible Enterprise Development Fund

AWF established an RWF 70 million conservation-compatible enterprise development fund providing grants and loans to support start-up and growth of small and medium-sized enterprises in the VNP landscape, with particular focus on women and youth entrepreneurs.

To date, RWF 21.14 million has been disbursed to 32 small businesses across agriculture, retail, and livestock sectors, with loan amounts ranging from RWF 100,000 to 1 million. These investments are creating sustainable livelihoods while reducing pressure on park resources.

4. Market Linkages with Private Sector

AWF facilitates connections between community enterprises and private sector partners such as tour operators, hotels, and agro-processors. Strategic partnerships are being finalized with GET IT for horticulture product market linkages and Red Rocks Initiative for community-based tourism operations, creating reliable market access for community producers.

5. Monitoring and Evaluation

AWF monitors and evaluates the impact of livelihood interventions on household incomes, well-being, and conservation outcomes using participatory methods and robust socio-economic indicators. This data informs adaptive management and helps identify successful approaches for scale-up.

PROOF POINTS:
TRANSFORMING LIVES
THROUGH ENTERPRISE

**PROOF POINT 1:
Business Incubation Program**

The first cohort of 132 aspiring entrepreneurs has completed intensive training in business plan development, equipping them with essential skills for success. Program demographics demonstrate strong inclusivity:

Among the success stories, Uwera Esther established a thriving egg production business and Mukarwego Agnes developed a successful Irish potato seed multiplication enterprise that now employs two young women and produces 4,000 kg of seeds per season. Agnes was selected as Manager of the Horticulture Hub, positioning her as a community leader in sustainable agriculture.

132
ENTREPRENEURS
TRAINED

63%
WOMEN
PARTICIPANTS

2%
PERSONS WITH
DISABILITIES

42%
YOUTH (35 YEARS
AND BELOW)

**PROOF POINT 2:
VCA Horticulture Hub**

RWF 5.5M REVENUE GENERATED
FROM INITIAL HARVEST

160 FARMERS
TRAINED

The Volcanoes Community Association (VCA) Horticulture Hub was officially launched on August 30, 2025, marking a significant milestone for community-led enterprise development.

The hub features three state-of-the-art greenhouses, a modern nursery, and packaging facilities designed for premium quality production targeting high-end hotels and export markets.

INITIAL RESULTS:

6,941 kg

First plantations of tomatoes, cucumbers, and sweet peppers established

4.2 tonnes of tomatoes, 1.8 tonnes of cucumber, 1.4 tonnes of sweet peppers generating **RWF 5.5 million in revenue**

160 smallholder farmers trained in climate-smart horticulture techniques (72% women, 28% men, 19% youth)

40+ farmer jobs created, 15 greenhouse jobs, 5 packing jobs

20% of profits reinvested into community development projects

The hub demonstrates the economic viability of high-value horticulture in the Volcanoes landscape while providing stable employment and reducing dependence on subsistence agriculture near park boundaries.



Community members carrying out their daily farming activities near conservation areas.



From subsistence farming to high-value horticulture: creating prosperity while protecting the park.

OBJECTIVE 3

ACHIEVE INTEGRATED CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT OUTCOMES

STRATEGIC GOAL:

By 2030, develop and adopt a participatory land use plan ensuring 80% of the VNP landscape is under sustainable management practices that integrate conservation and development objectives.

THE 'HOW': MASTER PLANNING AS THE INTEGRATION MECHANISM

This objective answers the critical question: How do we ensure that habitat conservation and livelihood development are not competing priorities, but mutually reinforcing elements of a single system?

The answer lies in comprehensive landscape-level planning that provides a spatial framework, coordinates action across sectors, and ensures that every intervention contributes to both conservation and development goals.

OUR ACTIONS: BUILDING THE PLANNING INFRASTRUCTURE

1. Participatory Land Use Planning Process
AWF engaged local communities, government agencies, conservation organizations, and other stakeholders in a participatory land use planning process using multiple consultation methods:

7 Public consultation meetings engaging 327 stakeholders at village, cell, and district levels

8 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with 64 participants (women, youth, vulnerable populations)

22 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with local leaders, government officials, NGOs, and private sector representatives

This deep stakeholder engagement ensured that the plan reflects local knowledge, respects community aspirations, and builds ownership essential for long-term sustainability.

2. Capacity Building for Sustainable Land Management
AWF developed and implemented capacity-building programs for local communities, government agencies, and other stakeholders to enhance skills and knowledge in sustainable land management practices.

The Climate-Smart Agriculture training (160 farmers trained) and Business Incubation Program (132 entrepreneurs trained) are core components of this capacity-building strategy.

160 FARMERS TRAINED

102 ENTREPRENEURS TRAINED

3. Landscape-Level Monitoring System
AWF established a landscape-level monitoring and evaluation system using remote sensing, field surveys, and participatory methods to track progress toward implementation of the land use plan and assess its impacts on conservation and development outcomes over time.

This system provides the data infrastructure for adaptive management.

THE PROOF POINT: THE VNP CONSERVATION & DEVELOPMENT MASTER PLAN

MARCH 2024

MASTER PLAN COMPLETED

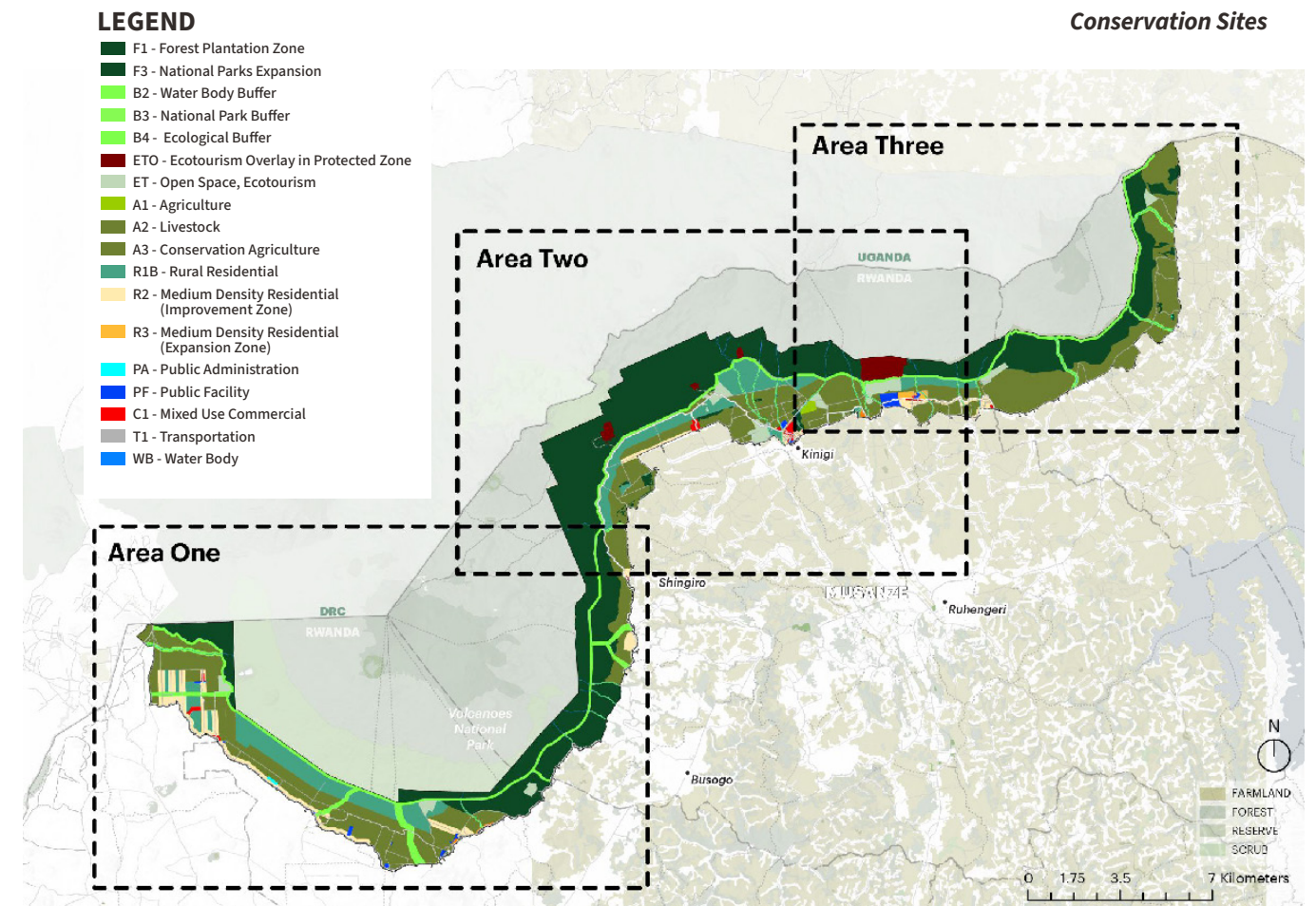
The primary outcome of this objective is the VNP Conservation & Development Master Plan itself, completed in March 2024. This comprehensive plan provides the spatial blueprint for balancing gorilla habitat expansion with socio-economic development. The plan comprises three interconnected components:

BASELINE ASSESSMENT: Comprehensive situational analysis of ecological, social, and economic conditions

LAND USE PLAN (LUP): Spatial framework establishing zones with gradient from human to natural uses, ensuring 80% of landscape under sustainable management

CONSERVATION INVESTMENT BLUEPRINT (CIB): Investment-ready roadmap translating the spatial plan into bankable opportunities (detailed under Objective 4)

Section IV of this report provides an in-depth examination of how this Master Plan translates baseline data into actionable strategy and investment opportunities.



From competing priorities to integrated solutions: one landscape, one plan, shared prosperity.

OBJECTIVE 4

MOBILIZE SUSTAINABLE FINANCING AND RESOURCING MECHANISMS

STRATEGIC GOAL:

By 2030, mobilize at least \$10 million in sustainable financing for conservation and community development initiatives through public, private, and philanthropic sources.

THE STRATEGY: BUILDING DIVERSE, LONG-TERM FUNDING STREAMS

Sustainable financing is the linchpin that ensures the long-term viability of conservation and development outcomes. AWF's strategy recognizes that dependence on any single funding source creates vulnerability. The approach is to build a diversified portfolio of funding streams, donor grants, Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) schemes, private sector investment, and innovative financing mechanisms, that together provide stable, long-term support while reducing aid dependency.

OUR ACTIONS: ACTIVATING MULTIPLE FINANCING CHANNELS

- 1. Donor Proposals and Philanthropic Partnerships**
AWF develops and submits proposals to international and bilateral donor agencies, foundations, and philanthropic sources to secure grant funding for specific conservation and development projects in the VNP landscape.
- 2. Payment for Ecosystem Services Schemes**
AWF is exploring opportunities for developing and implementing PES schemes such as carbon credits and biodiversity offsets in collaboration with private sector partners, government agencies, and local communities.

The 27-hectare restoration project contributes to Rwanda's climate change mitigation efforts through carbon sequestration by restored vegetation, establishing proof of concept for future carbon financing.

3. Private Sector Engagement and Public-Private Partnerships

AWF engages with private sector actors including tourism operators, agribusinesses, and infrastructure developers to explore Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) investments, joint ventures, and public-private partnerships.

Strategic partnerships with Red Rocks Initiative (CBT operations) and GET IT (horticulture market linkages) exemplify this approach, bringing private sector expertise and investment to community-led initiatives.

4. Conservation-Compatible Enterprise Investments

The Enterprise Development Fund represents a revolving financing mechanism where loan repayments are reinvested to support additional entrepreneurs.

To date, RWF 21.14 million has been disbursed to 32 businesses, with early success stories (like Agnes Mukarwego's potato seed enterprise) demonstrating rapid loan repayment and reinvestment potential.

THE PROOF POINT: THE CONSERVATION INVESTMENT BLUEPRINT

RWF 2.1M+
DEPLOYED

32 ENTERPRISES
FUNDED

CIB COMPLETED

INVESTMENT-READY ROADMAP

The Conservation Investment Blueprint (CIB) is the key tool for achieving this objective. It translates the Master Plan into a bankable roadmap designed to attract and guide public and private investment into specific, sustainable, and profitable community enterprises.

The CIB provides:

- Detailed investment cases for conservation, tourism, agriculture, and settlement services sectors
- SWOT analyses, investment requirements, revenue models, and risk mitigation measures
- Phased implementation timeline (short-term, medium-term, long-term projects)
- Three Investment Zones aligned with the Land Use Plan, ensuring spatial coherence

Section IV provides a comprehensive examination of how the CIB creates the bridge from planning to financing, making the VNP program attractive to diverse investor types.

CONSERVATION

- PARK EXPANSION
- RESEARCH CENTER
- PARK ADMIN OFFICES
- RESEARCH CENTER
- HABITAT CORRIDOR
- RIPARIAN BUFFER
- ECOTOURISM

SETTLEMENT

- HOUSING
- TRADING CENTER
- ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES
- SCHOOLS
- HEALTH CENTER
- INFRASTRUCTURE

AGRICULTURE

- EXTENSION CENTER
- COMMUNITY ORCHARD
- FLORICULTURE
- POST-HARVEST FACILITIES
- SEED MULTIPLICATION
- PYRETHRUM
- POTATO FARMING
- FORESTRY

From aid dependency to sustainable financing: building a diversified investment portfolio for conservation.



Golden monkeys, like gorillas, benefit from ongoing habitat restoration in Volcanoes National Park.

Deep Dive: The Volcanoes National Park Conservation & Development Master Plan

INTRODUCTION: STRATEGIC PLANNING AS CONSERVATION INFRASTRUCTURE

The future of Volcanoes National Park depends not on good intentions alone, but on rigorous analysis, inclusive design, and investment-ready planning. Over the past two years, AWF has led a comprehensive master planning process that has transformed our understanding of the VNP landscape and created a roadmap for the next 25 years.

This wasn't planning by committee or planning by assumption. It was planning driven by data, shaped by communities, and designed for impact. The result is three interconnected documents that together form the most comprehensive conservation and development blueprint ever created for Rwanda's most iconic landscape.

This section deconstructs that process, showing how we moved from analysis to spatial design to bankable investment opportunities. More importantly, it demonstrates why sophisticated donors can invest with confidence: Because every intervention we propose is grounded in evidence, tested with stakeholders, and designed to deliver measurable results.

From Data to Action: A Model for Africa's Future

The Three-Phase Journey: Building a Model from the Ground Up

Master Plan Component	What This Delivered	Timeline	Key Stakeholders
Phase 1: Baseline Assessment	Comprehensive situational analysis of biodiversity, socio-economics, and governance	2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 327+ stakeholders through 7 public meetings • 9 FGDs • 22 KII
Phase 2: Land Use Plan	Spatial blueprint balancing conservation and development	Completed March 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local communities • Government agencies • RDB • District authorities
Phase 3: Conservation Investment Blueprint	Investment-ready project portfolio	2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private sector • Government • Community associations

PHASE 1: WHAT WE LEARNED

THE BASELINE ASSESSMENT - UNDERSTANDING OUR STARTING POINT

Before designing solutions, we needed to understand the full complexity of the challenge. Our baseline assessment provided a 360-degree view of the VNP landscape, its ecological treasures, its socio-economic realities, and the threats that could undermine both.

THE "SO WHAT?"

The baseline assessment revealed a fundamental truth: Habitat expansion alone will fail without simultaneous investment in community livelihoods and infrastructure. Conversely, community development that ignores ecological limits will ultimately impoverish both people and nature.

The solution had to be integrated by design, not by aspiration.

Key Findings: The "So What?" That Shaped Everything

Finding	The Reality	The Implication
Conservation Success Creates New Pressure	Mountain gorilla population recovered from 200-300 in the 1970s to over 600 today	The park's current 13,000 hectares cannot support continued population growth. Habitat expansion is not optional; it's urgent.
Human-Wildlife Conflict Is Escalating	Crop raiding by buffaloes and gorillas causes significant economic loss to farmers	Without mitigation, local support for conservation erodes. Any expansion plan must include conflict reduction measures.
Poverty Drives Resource Pressure	High poverty rates (particularly in rural areas) mean communities depend on subsistence agriculture	Sustainable livelihoods aren't a "nice to have"; they're the foundation of long-term conservation success.
Tourism Is Vulnerable	Heavy reliance on gorilla trekking makes the sector fragile to external shocks (e.g., pandemics)	Economic diversification through community-based tourism, agriculture, and enterprise is essential for resilience.
Climate Change Is Here	Increasing rainfall intensity, flooding, landslides, and soil erosion threaten both ecosystems and communities	Climate adaptation must be integrated into every intervention, from reforestation techniques to agricultural practices.
Infrastructure Gaps Limit Development	Inadequate roads, water, sanitation, and waste management in rural areas	Infrastructure investment is prerequisite for unlocking sustainable economic opportunities.

Habitat expansion alone will fail without simultaneous investment in community livelihoods and infrastructure.

PHASE 2: WHAT WE DESIGNED

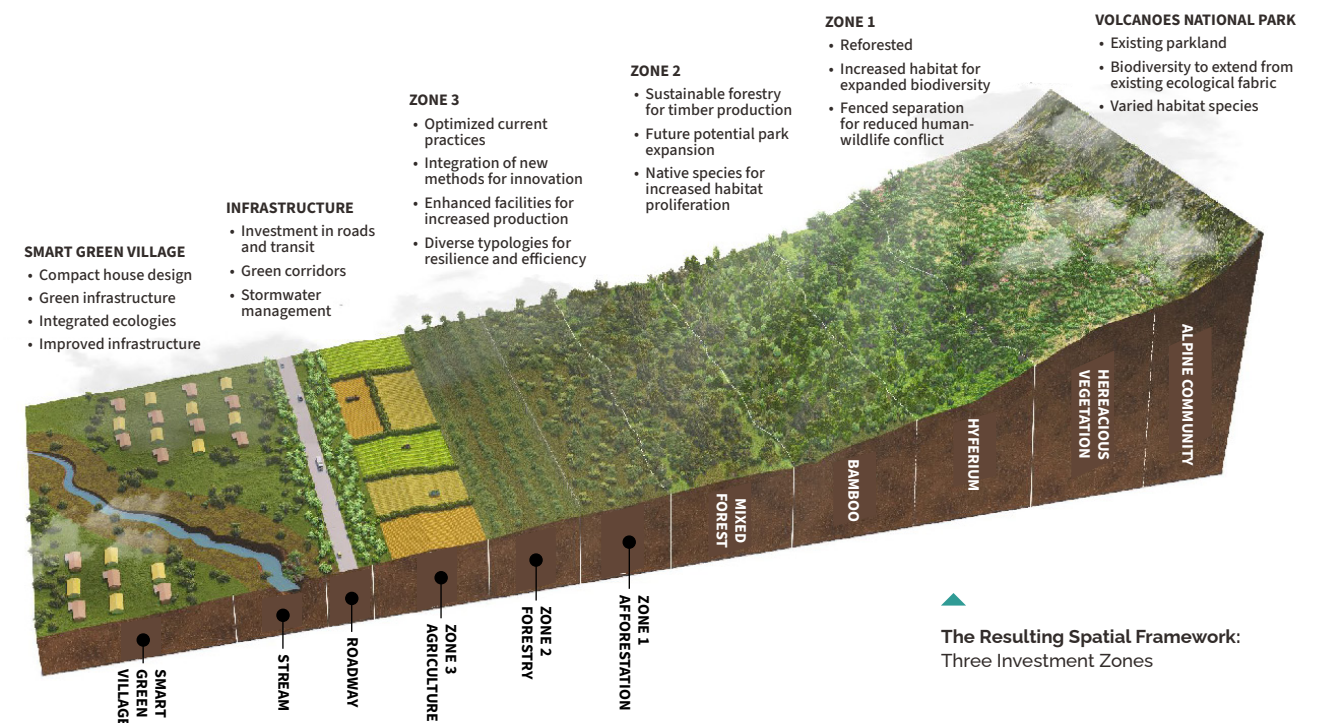
THE LAND USE PLAN - A SPATIAL BLUEPRINT FOR COEXISTENCE

With a clear understanding of the challenges, we moved to spatial design. The Land Use Plan is a collaboratively built framework that balances gorilla habitat with human aspirations.

CORE DESIGN PRINCIPLES

The Land Use Plan is guided by five principles that ensure its viability and legitimacy:

- 1. Communities as Partners, Not Adversaries:** Traditional "fortress conservation" that excludes people is both ethically wrong and practically unsustainable. Our plan positions communities as active stewards whose well-being is tied to conservation success.
- 2. Gradient Zoning:** Rather than hard boundaries, the plan creates a gradient from intensive human use (settlements, agriculture) through buffer zones (agroforestry, sustainable forestry) to core conservation areas (expanded park, wildlife corridors).
- 3. Optimize, Don't Maximize:** Not all land is equally suited for all purposes. The plan uses suitability mapping to match land use to landscape conditions, putting agriculture on productive soils, conservation on steep slopes and critical habitats.
- 4. Connectivity for Wildlife:** Isolated habitat patches create ecological islands. The plan identifies and protects wildlife corridors that allow species movement, genetic exchange, and range expansion.
- 5. Climate Resilience by Design:** Every land use designation incorporates climate adaptation measures, from reforestation to erosion reduction, to climate-smart agriculture, to green infrastructure in settlements.



The Resulting Spatial Framework: Three Investment Zones

Zone	Primary Function	Key Activities	Target Area
ZONE 1: Core Conservation	Park expansion & habitat restoration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tree nurseries Native bamboo restoration Wildlife corridor establishment Anti-poaching operations 	Expanding Park boundaries to accommodate growing wildlife populations
ZONE 2: Buffer & Sustainable Use	Forestry, ecotourism & sustainable resource management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Beekeeping Sustainable logging Ecotourism infrastructure Community-based tourism 	Areas adjacent to the park where conservation-compatible livelihoods reduce pressure on core habitats
ZONE 3: Intensified Production & Green Villages	Agriculture, livestock & densified settlement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Horticulture & high-value crops Poultry farming Settlement services Modern infrastructure (water, electricity, sanitation) 	Areas with existing human occupation, optimized for sustainable intensification

PHASE 3: HOW WE WILL FUND IT

THE CONSERVATION INVESTMENT BLUEPRINT - MAKING THE PLAN BANKABLE

A plan without financing is a wish. The Conservation Investment Blueprint transforms the Land Use Plan's spatial vision into investment-ready projects that attract public, private, and philanthropic capital.

THE CIB'S STRATEGIC LOGIC

The CIB identifies market opportunities where conservation and economic development align. It doesn't ask investors to choose between profit and impact; it shows them how to achieve both.

Guiding Principles:

- **Conservation & Sustainability:** Every investment must demonstrably benefit biodiversity or ecosystem services
- **Climate Resilience:** Projects must enhance (not undermine) the landscape's ability to withstand climate shocks
- **Do No Harm:** Rigorous social and environmental safeguards ensure communities benefit equitably
- **Livelihood Improvement:** Economic returns must reach local households, with focus on women and youth

INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES BY ZONE

The CIB organizes opportunities according to the Land Use Plan's three-zone framework:



Community Eco-Guard engaged in field activities to protect local ecosystems and promote sustainable natural resource management.

ZONE 1: Conservation & Restoration (Target: 1,000 hectares restored by 2030)

Investment Opportunity	Business Case	Current Status	Funding Need
Native Bamboo Restoration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Critical gorilla habitat Carbon sequestration potential PES revenue opportunities 	27 ha completed (proof of concept)	Scale to 1,000 ha over 5 years
Afromontane Tree Nurseries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supports restoration pipeline Employment for local communities Indigenous seed banking 	Under development	Initial capitalization needed
Wildlife Corridor Establishment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduces human-wildlife conflict Enables population growth Protects investment in gorilla tourism 	Spatial planning complete	Land acquisition & fencing

ZONE 2: Buffer Zone Enterprises (Target: 500 households with sustainable livelihoods)

Investment Opportunity	Business Case	Current Status	Funding Need
Apiary (Beekeeping)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High-value export market Low land requirements Pollination services for agriculture 	Feasibility complete	Equipment & training
Community-Based Tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extends visitor stays beyond gorilla trekking Direct revenue to VCA (60% of net profits) Creates 25-30 jobs 	Center under construction (completion Oct 2025)	Operational capital & marketing
Sustainable Timber & Bamboo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demand from construction sector Agroforestry diversifies farm income Erosion control co-benefit 	Market linkages established	Processing infrastructure

ZONE 3: Agricultural Intensification & Green Villages (Target: 30% increase in household income)

Investment Opportunity	Business Case	Current Status	Funding Need
Horticulture Hub	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Premium market (high-end hotels) Export potential Training platform for 150 farmers 20% of profits reinvested in community 	Launched Aug 2025: Generated RWF 5.5M from first harvest	Scale production & market linkages
High-Value Crop Production	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Floriculture, fruits, off-season vegetables Higher returns per hectare than subsistence crops 	160 farmers trained (Q1 2025)	Input financing & post-harvest handling
Small Enterprises	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rapid income generation Women-focused (63% of entrepreneurs) Proven success (see Esther's story) 	32 businesses funded via Enterprise Fund	Scale to 100 enterprises
Green Village Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Essential services (water, sanitation, electricity) Enables other investments Reduces pressure on park resources 	Site planning in progress	Public-private partnership needed

Our Commitment to People and Principles: Transparency in Action

CONSERVATION THAT WORKS FOR PEOPLE, NOT DESPITE THEM

At the African Wildlife Foundation, we recognize a fundamental truth: Conservation cannot succeed at the expense of communities. The expansion of Volcanoes National Park, vital for mountain gorilla habitat, directly affects the lives and livelihoods of hundreds of households. This section demonstrates our commitment to ensuring that conservation not only protects wildlife but also respects human rights, promotes equity, and creates pathways for communities to thrive.

1. Social Safeguards: Building Trust Through Accountability

At the heart of the VNP Conservation and Development Master Plan lies a deep commitment to social safeguards. These aren't bureaucratic checkboxes; they're the operational proof of our values.

Every aspect of park expansion, habitat restoration, and community resettlement has been designed with robust safeguards to protect rights, ensure fair compensation, and create opportunities for affected communities.

We don't just talk about "doing no harm"; we've built comprehensive systems to prove it.

Social Safeguard Instruments

Instrument	Full Name	Purpose: What It Does
RAP	Resettlement Action Plan	Provides a comprehensive roadmap for managing the resettlement of communities affected by park expansion. Ensures adequate compensation, livelihood restoration programs, and support during transition to new livelihoods.
ESIA	Environmental and Social Impact Assessment	A detailed analysis of all potential social and environmental impacts (both positive and negative) associated with project activities. Identifies vulnerable groups and proposes specific mitigation measures to address their needs and concerns.
RPF	Resettlement Policy Framework	The overarching policy document that guides all resettlement activities. Ensures compliance with Rwandan national laws (Constitution, Land Law, Expropriation Law) and international best practices including World Bank Environmental and Social Standards.
ESCP	Environmental and Social Commitment Plan	Details our specific commitment to environmental and social sustainability throughout the project lifecycle. Includes measures to manage risks and impacts related to resettlement, community health and safety, and stakeholder engagement, with monitoring and reporting mechanisms.
GAP	Gender and Anti-Gender-Based Violence Action Plan	Promotes gender equality and prevents gender-based violence throughout project implementation. Ensures women's voices are heard, women-led enterprises are supported, and protection mechanisms are in place.
LMP	Labor Management Procedures	Establishes fair labor practices and ensures the health and safety of all workers involved in project activities. Covers employment terms, working conditions, grievance mechanisms, and protections against exploitation.

2. Standards and Compliance: Meeting the Highest Bar

The VNP Master Plan adheres to a rigorous framework of national and international standards:

- **National Laws and Policies:** Full compliance with the Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda, the Land Law, the Expropriation Law, and the National Land Policy.

These legal instruments ensure that affected communities' rights are respected and that they receive fair and just compensation for any losses.

- **World Bank Environmental and Social Standards (ESSs):** As a World Bank-supported initiative, the project adheres to all applicable Environmental and Social Standards, particularly ESS5 (Land Acquisition, Restrictions on Land Use and Involuntary Resettlement) and ESS10 (Stakeholder Engagement and Information Disclosure).

These standards provide a comprehensive framework for managing social risks and impacts, minimizing displacement, protecting vulnerable groups, and promoting meaningful community participation.

- **AWF's Safeguard Policies:** AWF has its own comprehensive safeguard policies that align with the best international practices. These policies ensure that AWF's interventions respect human rights, promote equity, and foster community well-being in all our conservation work.

RIGHTS-BASED CONSERVATION: COMMUNITIES AS PARTNERS

AWF has mainstreamed a rights-based approach to conservation throughout our work in Rwanda. This approach integrates human rights norms, standards, and principles into every stage of conservation, from policy design and planning to implementation and outcome evaluation. We recognize both our direct and indirect dependencies on nature and our role as duty bearers to the

rights holders affected by our work.

Community Engagement: Quantified Participation

The VNP Master Plan wasn't designed in a boardroom; it was co-created with the people it affects.

Here are the numbers that prove it:

Engagement Method	Number	Purpose
Public Consultation Meetings	7 meetings 327 stakeholders	Open forums held at village, cell, and district levels to disseminate information about the project, gather feedback, and address concerns. These meetings fostered transparency and allowed community members to contribute to decision-making.
Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)	9 FGDs	Targeted discussions with specific groups, including women, youth, and vulnerable populations to gain deeper insights into their unique needs and perspectives. These created safe spaces for open dialogue and identification of specific concerns and priorities.
Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)	22 KIIs	In-depth interviews with local leaders, government officials, NGO representatives, and private sector stakeholders to gather expert opinions and insights on the project's potential impacts and benefits.

Grievance Redress Mechanism: A Voice for Every Concern

- A robust Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM) has been established to ensure that any concerns or complaints arising from the project are addressed in a timely, transparent, and fair manner. The GRM is accessible to all stakeholders, including vulnerable groups, and provides a clear process for submitting and resolving grievances.
- The project team is committed to responding to grievances promptly and effectively, ensuring that affected individuals and communities have a voice and that their concerns are taken seriously.

Capacity Building for Community Participation

In 2025, we trained **15 members of Land Dispute Resolution Committees** on resolving land-related conflicts.

This training evaluated committee performance and refreshed knowledge on conflict resolution, critical for ensuring smooth land acquisition processes and reducing community tensions around resource access and park expansion.



Community Eco-Guards engaged in field activities to protect local ecosystems and promote sustainable natural resource management.

Ongoing Initiatives 2025

1. LANDSCAPE RESTORATION PARTNERSHIP

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE ALIGNMENT:
Objective 1 – Expand and Rehabilitate Habitat

KEY METRICS

27 HECTARES RESTORED

28K+

NATIVE BAMBOO & INDIGENOUS PLANTS

In partnership with the Rwanda Development Board and EcoPlanet Bamboo Rwanda, AWF successfully restored 27 hectares of donated land within Volcanoes National Park.

This flagship restoration project demonstrates the viability of native bamboo (*Yushania alpina*) restoration at scale, a critical intervention given that bamboo comprises a significant portion of the mountain gorilla diet.

The restored area is already showing positive ecological outcomes. Mountain gorillas and golden monkeys have been observed utilizing the newly planted areas, demonstrating immediate habitat value. This project serves as the pilot model for future park expansion activities identified in the Land Use Plan.



Forests emerging at the foothills of Volcanoes National Park, supporting future wildlife habitats.

2. CONSERVATION-COMPATIBLE ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE ALIGNMENT:
Objective 2 – Diversify Incomes & Expand Opportunities

132
ENTREPRENEURS TRAINED

RWF 2.1M+
DISBURSED TO 32 ENTERPRISES

Through our partnership with Inkomoko, AWF launched a comprehensive business incubation program targeting communities directly affected by the VNP expansion.

The program provides intensive training in business planning, financial management, market entry strategies, and investment readiness, equipping participants with skills to build sustainable enterprises.

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

63%

Women – Prioritizing gender inclusion in economic empowerment

42%

Youth (35 years and below) – Building the next generation of conservation-minded entrepreneurs

2%

Persons with Disabilities – Ensuring inclusive economic opportunity



3. VCA HORTICULTURE PRODUCTION HUB

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE ALIGNMENT: Objectives 2 & 4 - Livelihoods & Sustainable Finance

RWF 5.5M REVENUE GENERATED

160 FARMERS TRAINED

72% WOMEN PARTICIPANTS

The Volcanoes Community Association Horticulture Hub, officially launched on August 30, 2025, represents a transformative investment in community-owned enterprise.

This state-of-the-art facility features three modern greenhouse systems, a nursery, and sorting/packaging facilities designed for premium quality production targeting high-end hotels and export markets.

The Hub's initial harvest of tomatoes, cucumbers, and sweet peppers has already generated RWF 5.5 million in revenue, proving the commercial viability of high-value horticulture in the Volcanoes landscape. Critically, 20% of all profits are reinvested into community development projects, creating a self-sustaining model for conservation-compatible economic growth.

EMPLOYMENT CREATED:

40+ farmer positions

15 greenhouse worker positions

5 packing and sorting positions



4. COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM CENTER

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE ALIGNMENT: Objective 2 – Diversify Incomes & Expand Opportunities

STATUS:

Construction Underway: Opening Expected Q2 2026

The Community-Based Tourism (CBT) Center addresses a critical gap in the Volcanoes tourism experience: Visitors who complete gorilla trekking by midday often have limited options for meaningful engagement with local communities.

The CBT Center will offer diverse cultural experiences, authentic crafts, traditional performances, and culinary offerings—extending visitor stays from 1.5 days to 2.5 days while generating sustainable income for local communities.

PROJECTED IMPACT

25-30 direct community employment positions

50-75 artisans and craft producers in supply chain

8K-10K annual visitors by Year 3

60% of net profits allocated to VCA community development



5. YOUTH EMPOWERMENT & LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE ALIGNMENT:
Objectives 2 & 3 – Livelihoods & Integrated Outcomes

AWF's commitment to youth extends from skills training to continental leadership development.

In 2025, our youth programming achieved impact at multiple levels—from equipping local TVET graduates with professional toolkits to supporting African youth voices at the continental African Youth Summit on Biodiversity.

LOCAL SKILLS

8

TVET Graduates Equipped with Professional Toolkits

CONTINENTAL LEADERSHIP

30

Local Youth Supported at AYSB2025

YOUTH VOLUNTEERS SUPPORT

200

youth volunteers financially supported by AWF—that is 2,100,000 RWF/month

TVET Graduate Support

Eight young graduates from TVET programs (3 women, 5 men) received professional toolkits enabling an immediate career launch in green economy sectors. These graduates, from communities near protected areas, completed intensive training in carpentry, plumbing, electrical work, and construction—skills essential for the infrastructure development planned under the VNP Master Plan.



TVET graduates equipped with professional toolkits for launching careers in green economy sectors.

African Youth Summit on Biodiversity (AYSB2025)

AWF Rwanda supported 30 local youth to participate in the third African Youth Summit on Biodiversity held in Kigali (October 20-22, 2025). Under the theme "Centralizing Youth and Synergizing Africa's Priorities for Timely Implementation of the Global Biodiversity Framework," young Rwandan leaders joined 96 in-person delegates and 400+ virtual participants from across Africa.



Partners: GYBN Africa, IUCN, Ministry of Environment of Rwanda, Global Landscapes Forum



Handmade wooden gorilla sculptures by communities near Volcanoes National Park celebrate conservation and culture.

Beneficiary Success Stories

The following stories illustrate the transformative impact of strategic investments in enterprise development and capacity building, demonstrating how the VNP model creates sustainable livelihoods while supporting conservation objectives.

SUCCESS STORY 1

FROM SUBSISTENCE TO ENTREPRENEURSHIP: ESTHER'S FRESH EGGS

UWERA ESTHER
25 years old
Kinigi Sector,
Musanze District

ENTERPRISE:
Esther's Fresh Eggs

SEED FUNDING:
RWF 1,300,000

Esther, a determined young woman from Kinigi Sector, once had a simple dream: Create a sustainable source of income while helping improve food security in the Volcanoes community. AWF, in partnership with Inkomoko, selected her among 132 people affected by the VNP expansion program who had relied on subsistence agriculture in the park buffer zone.

During the six-month Business Incubation Program (April–October 2024), Esther received intensive training in business ideation, business plan development, market analysis, risk assessment, and financial management. With mentorship support, she developed a comprehensive business plan for a commercial egg-laying chicken farm. After graduating, she pitched her plan during Demo Day and was awarded RWF 1,300,000 as seed funding.

Impact & Growth

Esther established her poultry farm starting with 20 layer chickens. She wisely reinvested profits, expanded her flock, and began hiring other young women in her community. Today, Esther's Fresh Eggs produces over 30 trays of eggs per week with consistent market demand. Beyond business success, Esther successfully returned to school following a financial break and is now helping her brother access educational materials. She mentors young girls interested in chicken farming, proving that youth-led enterprises can drive economic change.



“The incubation program didn't just fund my business; it transformed me into a leader. I used to doubt myself, but today, I employ others and help feed my community. If you have a dream, start small, learn constantly, and never give up.

— UWERA Esther —

SUCCESS STORY 2

EMPOWERING AGRICULTURAL INNOVATION: AGNES'S SEED ENTERPRISE

MUKARWEGO AGNES
37 years old
Mother of 2
Kinigi Sector
Musanze District

Agnes, a determined mother of two from Kinigi Sector, once struggled to provide for her family with only a small plot of land and limited income. She could barely afford school supplies or medical care for her children, depending on casual labor to feed her family.

ENTERPRISE:
Irish Potato Seed Multiplication

SEED FUNDING:
RWF 600,000

AWF, in partnership with Inkomoko and RIM, selected Agnes among people affected by park expansion to join the Business Incubation Program.

During the program, Agnes entered with a passion for Irish potato seed multiplication but lacked technical, financial, and business skills. She received intensive training and after graduating in October 2024, pitched her business plan and was awarded RWF 600,000 as startup funding.

BEFORE

200 kg

seeds/season

AFTER

4,000 kg

seeds/season

Agnes is determined to expand by constructing a seed multiplication facility and increasing production to 10 tonnes per season within the next four years. Her story demonstrates how strategic investments matched with determination and support can transform lives, create local jobs, and spark sustainable development in rural communities

Transformation Metrics

Life-Changing Impact

- ✓ Loan repaid in just 3 months
- ✓ 2 children now in secondary school with fees covered
- ✓ Health insurance secured for family and relatives
- ✓ Hired 2 young women employees
- ✓ Selected as Manager of VCA Horticulture Hub



“

For years, I struggled to provide for my family. With only a small plot of land and limited income, I could barely afford school supplies or medical care for my children. The grant wasn't just money; it was a chance to dream again. Now, my children go to school with shoes and lunch. I feel respected in my community.”

— MUKARWEGO Agnes —

Challenges & Lessons Learned

Transparency requires honest acknowledgment of challenges alongside successes. The following reflects our commitment to continuous learning and adaptive management.

KEY IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

1. Land Acquisition Pace

Challenge: Acquired only 2.86 ha against an 8 ha quarterly target (36% achievement) for VNP expansion.

Root Cause: Lengthy land title verification procedures; many farmers lack formal documentation; encroachment disputes require resolution before acquisition.

Mitigation: Close collaboration with local land administration; prioritizing plots with clear documentation; providing technical support for farmers to secure land titles.

2. Multi-Stakeholder Coordination

Challenge: Complex coordination across government agencies, communities, NGOs, and private sector partners has led to slower decision-making processes.

Mitigation: Established clearer institutional arrangements; multi-stakeholder platforms for joint planning; strengthened communication protocols and regular coordination meetings.

KEY LESSONS LEARNED

1. Strategic partnerships accelerate impact:

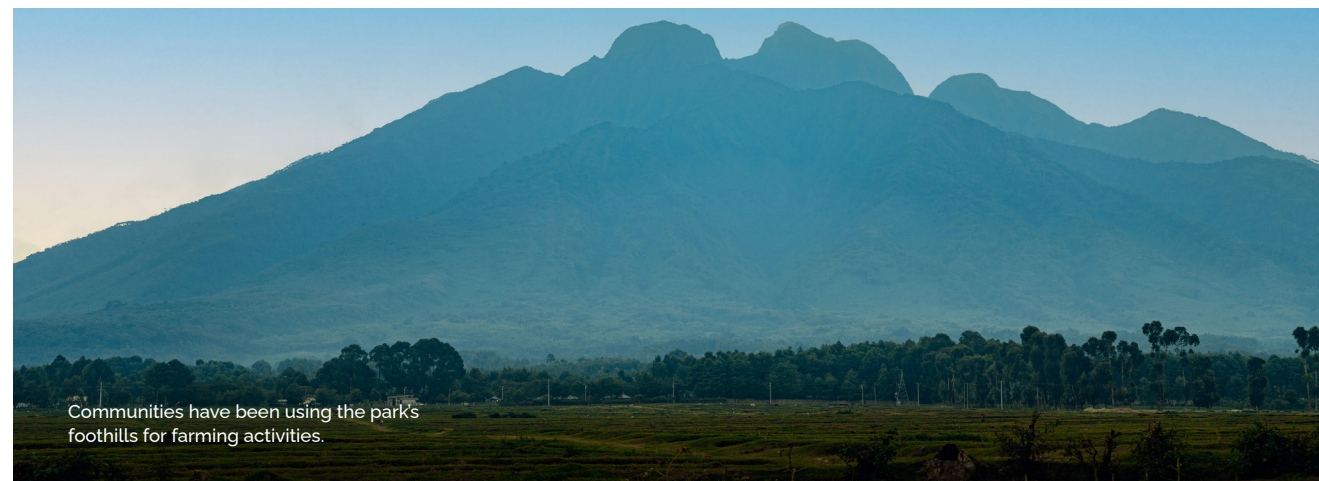
The partnerships with Red Rocks and GET IT demonstrate the value of leveraging specialized expertise and market access. Early engagement with technical partners accelerates implementation and improves quality.

2. Land administration requires buffer time:

Land acquisition timelines must account for documentation verification, dispute resolution, and administrative processes. Building relationships with local land offices expedites processes.

3. Demonstrating economic value builds support:

Quantifying the economic benefits of ecosystem services and biodiversity conservation strengthens support among policymakers and communities for conservation measures.



Communities have been using the park's foothills for farming activities.

A Look to the Horizon

FUTURE OUTLOOK AND CALL TO ACTION

The work documented in this report represents not an ending, but a beginning. Every hectare restored, every entrepreneur empowered, every partnership forged, every safeguard implemented—these are the building blocks of a larger vision. A vision where **Volcanoes National Park stands as a global model** for what is possible when conservation and development work in harmony.

The path ahead is clear. The momentum is building. And the opportunity to transform this landscape, and the lives it sustains, has never been greater.

1. THE PATH TO 2030: OUR STRATEGIC ROADMAP

Our 2030 vision is anchored in four SMART goals that define success for the VNP Landscape Conservation and Development Program. These are not aspirational dreams; they are measurable targets backed by rigorous planning and proven implementation capacity.

2030 SMART GOALS

HABITAT

1,000

hectares of degraded habitat restored and effectively managed for biodiversity conservation

LIVELIHOODS

500

households benefiting from sustainable livelihood initiatives with 30% income increase

PLANNING

80%

of landscape under sustainable management practices by 2026

FINANCE

\$10M

in sustainable financing mobilized from public, private, and philanthropic sources



Restoration Efforts: Launching of the restoration activities with RDB and EU representatives

PHASE	STRATEGIC PRIORITIES
<p>Phased Implementation Timeline</p> <p>The Conservation Investment Blueprint provides a clear timeline for achieving these goals through phased, strategic investments that build upon each other:</p>	<p>Scale Proof-of-Concept Initiatives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete CBT Center construction and launch operations • Scale Horticulture Hub to full production capacity • Expand Enterprise Fund to 100+ businesses • Secure Government of Rwanda approval for Master Plan • Complete park expansion social safeguards processes
	<p>Secure Major Investment for CIB Zones</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attract private sector investment for Zone 2 (ecotourism) and Zone 3 (agriculture) • Accelerate land acquisition to 200+ hectares for park expansion • Launch Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) mechanisms • Complete Smart Green Village resettlement with full social support
<p>YEARS 3-5 (2027-2030)</p>	<p>Replicate Model & Achieve Full Financing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieve 1,000 hectares under restoration and sustainable management • Reach 500 households with measurable income increases • Mobilize full \$10M CIB financing target • Document and package model for replication in other landscapes • Transition to local ownership with sustainable governance structures

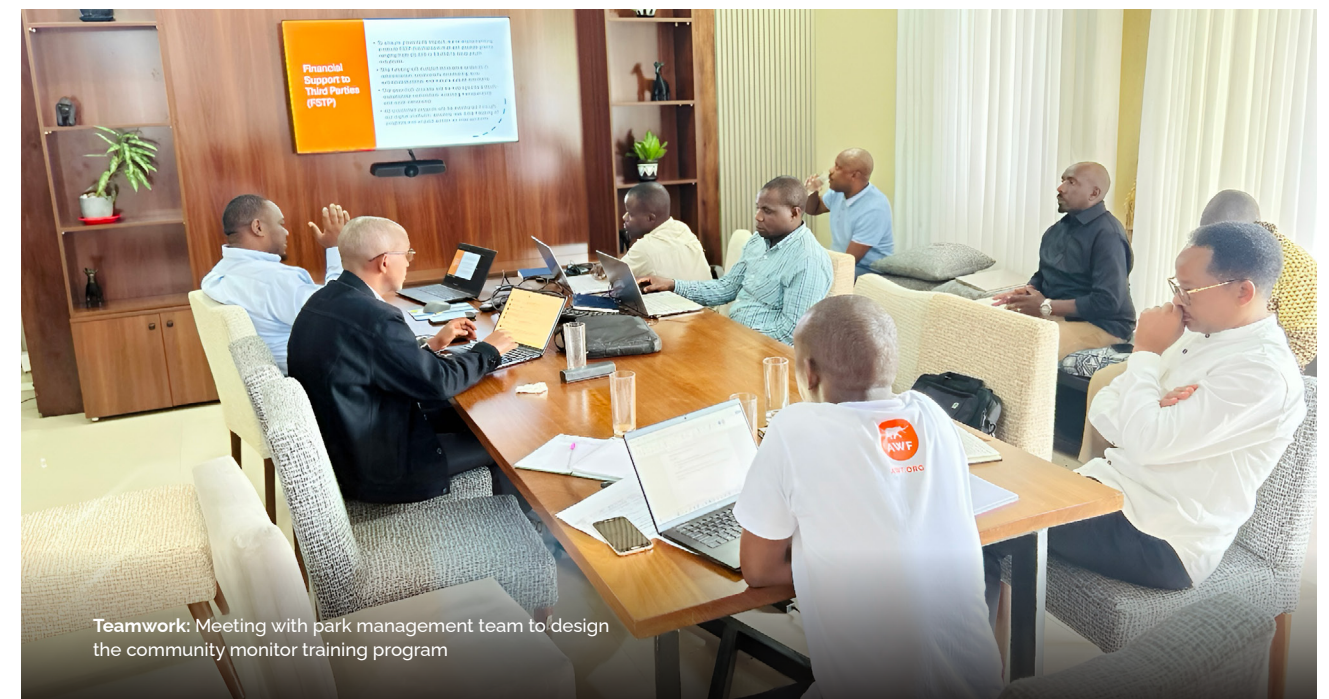


Restoration Efforts: Launching of the restoration activities with RDB and EU representatives

2. IMMEDIATE PRIORITIES: 2026 ACTION AGENDA

The coming year is pivotal. Building on the strong foundation established in 2024 and early 2025, we are focused on **six critical priorities** that will accelerate our trajectory toward 2030:

- 1. Complete and Launch the Community-Based Tourism Center**
Finalize construction, operationalize with Red Rocks Initiative, conduct official opening, and achieve a first-year target of 8,000+ visitors, generating sustainable revenue for the Volcanoes Community Association.
- 2. Scale Horticulture Hub to Full Commercial Operations**
Expand production across all three greenhouses, formalize GET IT market linkage agreement, train an additional 340 farmers (reaching 500 total), and establish hub as a self-sustaining enterprise reinvesting profits into community development.
- 3. Accelerate Land Acquisition for Park Expansion**
Target 30 hectares of land acquisition in 2026, addressing documentation and encroachment challenges identified in Q1. Implement enhanced land title support program and strengthen coordination with local land administration offices.
- 4. Secure Government Approval for the VNP Master Plan**
Complete dissemination workshops at district level, incorporate government feedback, and secure formal endorsement from the Government of Rwanda. This approval will unlock coordinated multi-stakeholder implementation across the 13,271-hectare landscape.
- 5. Expand Enterprise Development Fund to 100 Businesses**
Graduate current cohort of 32 funded enterprises, launch second Inkomoko incubation cohort, and expand fund disbursements to reach 100 conservation-compatible enterprises with particular focus on women (63%+) and youth (42%+) entrepreneurs.
- 6. Launch GIS-Based Performance Monitoring Platform**
Operationalize the TRACK platform to provide real-time spatial monitoring of 20+ Key Performance Indicators across all five strategic pillars. This will enable data-driven adaptive management and transparent progress reporting over the 25-year program horizon.



Teamwork: Meeting with park management team to design the community monitor training program

3. IMMEDIATE PRIORITIES: 2026 ACTION AGENDA



But as this report demonstrates, **these challenges are not insurmountable.**

We have proven that a rights-based, community-centered conservation model works. We have shown that habitat restoration can happen on a scale. We have demonstrated that local entrepreneurs can build sustainable businesses that reduce pressure on natural resources.

We have established partnerships with the Government of Rwanda, private sector leaders, and community organizations that are delivering real results.

- We have a **proven model**
- We have the **trust of the Rwandan government**
- We have a **meticulous plan**
- We have a **dedicated team** on the ground
- The only remaining variable is resources.**



Landscape restoration in the park's foothills: forests slowly flourishing

THE TIME FOR ACTION IS NOW

We ask you to join us. Partner with us. Invest in this plan.
 Help us build a future for Rwanda where people and wildlife thrive together.