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PASTORALISTS, FISHERMEN AND  
FARMERS IN AND AROUND LAKE  
MBURO NATIONAL PARK.  
Changing Conflict into Awareness and  
Responsibility.

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# **PASTORALISTS, FISHERMEN AND FARMERS IN AND AROUND LAKE MBURO NATIONAL PARK. Changing Conflict into Awareness and Responsibility.<sup>1</sup>**

## **INTRODUCTION:**

Lake Mburo National Park is Uganda's smallest savannah park covering only about 265 square kilometres, containing plant and animal species unique to the country. Located in the south west part of Uganda, the park supports Uganda's only impala as well as important populations of eland, topi, zebra, klipspringer and roan antelope, rare or absent elsewhere in the country, as well as many other large mammals. Other species like the giant forest hog, lion, hunting dog and others were indiscriminately hunted or poisoned out decades ago. Prior to its gazettement in 1983, the area had been managed as a Game reserve since 1964, after being upgraded from a Controlled Hunting Area. At that time several hundred families were resident in the area most of whom were predominantly nomadic or semi nomadic pastoralists. Some agriculturalists had also found their way into the area from neighbouring districts in search of land for agriculture due to shortages of land in their densely populated home districts. There were also resident families dependent exclusively on subsistence hunting or fishing on the numerous fresh water lakes in the area.

## **CONFLICT HISTORY**

When Lake Mburo was declared a national park in 1983, the legitimate residents were summarily evicted without adequate explanation, compensation or alternative and any form of resistance was crushed with the barrel of the gun. Many of the affected victims lost their lives and property.

When this government fell in 1986, the victims of the previous eviction returned with more land grabbers, determined to rid the area of any form of wildlife so that it ceased to be a national park. The existing park infrastructure was vandalized and all park staff were chased out. Pressure from the local and district leadership was put on the new government to have the whole park degazetted. The present government reduced the size to about 40% of the original area in an attempt to provide land to the deprived but retain an appreciable size of the park. The degazetted 60% turned out to be too little to accommodate the enraged "victims of previous eviction" and the tiny portion remaining for the park still remained with 350 families as landless squatters.

Resentment towards the park by communities excluded and those trapped inside the newly defined boundaries intensified. The park lacked support from local communities and their political leaders. It's existence and ultimate survival was seriously threatened by community and individual interests and competition for resources and land.

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## **FIRST ATTEMPTS**

The idea of having a Community Conservation Project working with the communities around this particular park was first conceived in 1989 and developed by Uganda National Parks (UNP) and the African Wildlife Foundation (AWF). It was obvious that the park would soon be no more if it did not popular support. Initial funds were secured from the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) to support the project for the first three years on a pilot basis, and provide lessons to UNP, the decision makers and the communities neighbouring this park and other national parks in the rest of the country.

Work with the communities started in July 1991 when a full time Community Conservation Warden (CCW) and three Community Conservation Rangers (CCRs) were recruited by UNP, forming a four man Community Conservation Unit (CCU) from within the management structure of the park, and seconded to the Lake Mburo Community Conservation Project (LMCCP).

The overall aim of the project was to help resolve the conflicts that existed between the Park and surrounding communities by initiating, encouraging and maintaining dialogue and cooperation between the park and it's immediate neighbours; helping to change attitudes of the surrounding communities towards the Park; and by demonstrating that the park could provide tangible benefits to local people, if it could continue to exist, and if its resources could be conserved.

The CCU, has been able to establish contacts with local communities through a mix of activities including: environmental education, community dialogue, and financial and logistical support to community initiated development projects (SCIPs). Fourteen such projects have been completed by way of giving assistance to building schools and clinics, providing training to community members in health and tree nursery management, supporting small scale revenue earning businesses, and assisting in controlling crop and property damage by wild animals.

The building of the relationship between the park and the neighbouring communities has gone through three stages:

### **1 CREATING GOOD RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE PARK AND THE PEOPLE.**

Establishing contacts by the CCU between the park and the people has been achieved through holding regular meetings with communities and their leaders resident within and adjacent to the national park to discuss Park - community related issues. This evolved into a park planning process with strong community input, and matured into the production of the park's first ever management plan for the years 1994-98 and the formation of the Park Management Advisory Committee (PMAC) on which pastoralists, agro-pastoralists, agriculturalists and fishermen are adequately represented, together with District Government and UNP staff.

Through the "Support to Community Initiated Projects" (SCIP) programme, community development related to conservation was stimulated. Communities have been assisted in developing and at times funding community micro projects which help create economic links



between Park and people, or just improve the public image of the Park. The project has assisted local communities gain assistance from government and other non-government organizations, for example the main access road to the national park was constructed through one of the community areas to ease cattle, produce and fish transport problems. The SCIP programme has been used as a community mobilization tool and helped ensure community participation and contribution towards the success of their micro-projects. Community contribution has always been either cash, kind or both.

There has been a continuous series of awareness programmes for communities, schools and other government institutions neighbouring the park. The project has encouraged and at times supported efforts by groups to come and visit the park. This resulted in the formation of wildlife clubs, bee keeping groups and other pro-conservation groups. Village nurseries have sprung up and training of community members in their management has been undertaken by the project.

Enlisting political support has been carried at the local and district leadership levels by regularly involving the local Resistance Councils (RCs) and district officials in park-community related issues through both formal and informal meetings. This has been further strengthened by having the district leadership and government sectoral departments represented on the PMAC as ex-officio members.

The park, through the CCU, has responded to problems of crop raid by marauding animals by organising, and participating in the communal hunting of nuisance animals such as buffalo and hippo. The meat has always gone to the community. An experiment using a live fence has been supported and tried with two farmers, and has proved successful.

The issue of landlessness is being tackled at the highest political level. The project funded the surveying and subsequent marking of the new park boundary for proper identification. The community participated in the opening of the boundary and actually participated in the making of permanent concrete boundary markers. As a result the exact location of the boundary is no longer ambiguous. Both Park and project have worked together with the Ranches Restructuring Board (RRB) to secure land within the various ranching schemes for the squatter families residing in the park especially landless herders. The project assisted UNP in securing funds to fully compensate those to be resettled outside the park for developments done inside the park and immovable properties.

## **2 INSTITUTIONALIZING THE RELATIONSHIP**

All legitimate stakeholders were involved in the planning process that gave birth to the park's management plan for the years 1994-98. A series of consultations were held with all interested stake holder groups within the 13 parishes neighbouring the park, the fishing community residing in the park, local leaders and members of the community outside the park. Community representatives attended subsequent workshops to review the draft plan before submission to the UNP Board of Trustees (UNP) for approval.

Grass root democratic elections of PMAC members were carried out in all the 13 parishes neighbouring the national park. Each parish representative on the PMAC is the chairman of a



democratically elected parish based Local Conservation Committee (LCC). Although the main role of PMAC is advisory, other important committee objectives include promoting community participation in park management; including local stake holders in the decision making process; monitoring and advising the park on the implementation of management programmes, especially on community resource use; coordinating communications and developing linkages between the park and the community; developing modalities for benefit, resource, and revenue sharing and controlling disbursement of funds; and discussing with park management issues pertaining to the relationship between park and communities.

Fishermen in the neighbouring parishes have organised themselves into a Fishing and Marketing Co-operative Society for purposes of fishing and management of the fisheries of the Lake inside the park.

### **3 STRENGTHENING THE INSTITUTION:**

PMAC general meetings have been held three times and twice for the committee executives. The committee has successfully implemented an experiment on revenue sharing which was supported using USAID funds through the project, for example roofing and plastering one primary school and re-roofing another nearly collapsing classroom. The committee and the LCCs in parishes where the experiment was to be carried out were trained in project development, administration, monitoring and evaluation; accounting and reporting procedures. The exercise demonstrated the parks willingness and ability to relinquish some decision making powers on who should get what and why to the PMAC. However, the experiment has provided lessons to UNP and LMNP in particular, as well as the PMAC institution, the local community and their leaders.

### **4 PARK-COMMUNITY CO-ACTION:**

The existence of PMAC and the CCU has brought the people closer to their own park and vice versa. Hostilities are slowly but gradually giving way to a mutual sharing of responsibilities. This new relationship has positive elements of mutual understanding, acceptance and tolerance except for the problem wildlife species. The park is represented on the committee by two officials. The PMAC acts as a bridge through which cooperation is executed and a channel for effective communication between park and local communities. The communities, through their LCCs now provide information on poaching to the park and participate in park protection activities. Community resource use zones exist on the management plan, and the committee and the park will develop mechanisms for sharing such resources, an activity that will require very strong government commitment especially at policy level.

In conclusion, relations with the people including their political leadership at the local and district levels has improved radically. But problems and real conflicts of interest still exist. Now such problems are faced in a spirit of cooperation and all attempts are being made to maintain the partnership and good neighbourliness status.