Chapter 9

Conservation

Lioba Lenhart and Lotte Meinert

Human-Wildlife Conflicts over Land

Lioba met Christopher Olum in July 2014 at Purongo sub-county headquarters. They had attended a meeting with the sub-county chief on human-wildlife conflict, and the chief had introduced Christopher to her as 'an interesting person to talk to about stray elephants'. Christopher was fifty years old and married to two wives with whom he had nine children. He was the head of one of the families that lived in Lawaca village, which borders the northern part of Murchison Falls National Park (MFNP), but he had moved to Purongo trading centre along with other families because of ongoing crop raids by elephants.

Christopher narrated that in 2007, when people returned home from the IDP camps, he and his family went back to Lawaca to resettle and farm their ancestral land, produce food for their daily consumption and sell some of the surplus on the local market to pay for the children's education and medical bills. 'We had a good start', he remembered, 'but this did not last for long'. About two years later, wild animals began to frequent the place, destroyed crops, damaged huts and granaries where stocks were kept, and sometimes attacked, injured and even killed people. 'We were in trouble and had to decide what to do', he said. So, they moved back to Purongo trading centre where they had lived in the IDP camp. Christopher rented a place to stay with his family and started to work for other people. He loaded heavy goods on trucks and did occasional work in the market to get money for rent and food but could no longer afford to support the children in school. When one of his wives was knocked by a motorcycle in the trading centre and admitted to hospital for three months, it was extremely

difficult to provide care for her. 'My life was torn apart, and sometimes I felt like leaving this world', he said.

Two years later, Christopher's life had not changed much, and he had become even more desperate and bitter. He talked about his 're-displacement' and lamented about the fate of his children, who were 'born in the camp, grew up in the camp, went back home shortly only to be displaced again to this trading centre' where they had learnt a lifestyle 'which is not in line with my family's norms'. He blamed the government for having ignored people's problems right from the mid-1980s until today.

Christopher remembered that before the war 'there were many animals, maybe more than what we have today in the park – elephants, hyenas, buffaloes and many others', but at that time wildlife had not been 'stubborn like this current elephant generation'. His family had planted cassava, maize, sesame, millet, groundnuts and many other crops. Only smaller animals such as squirrels and edible rats had sometimes ravaged groundnuts and millet. 'There were no food shortages in our homes, and we could even take food crops [surpluses] from Lawaca to Pakwach using the train', he recalled. He, his brothers and all male youths of Lawaca had paid bridewealth with money raised from farming crops. Money had still been enough for paying school fees. However, during the war between the LRA and government, they were given an ultimatum to leave their fertile land within only 24 hours. 'So, we hurriedly had to depart for imprisonment in the IDP camp and to behave like beggars, something I had not thought of at all', Christopher remembered. Here, while living in fear of rebel attacks and abductions, and seeing children and adults dying because of diseases and lack of medical services, they experienced serious shortages of food for the first time because handouts from World Food Programme were not enough.

During one of his discussions with Lioba in 2016, Christopher concluded that people had been left alone with their plight, and he painted a very gloomy picture of the future, saying:

> UWA [Uganda Wildlife Authority] staff, central and local government, and our political representatives from Local Council to Parliament have always turned a blind eye to our problems and appeals. They are eating well, can pay for the schools of their children and are looking at us as fools . . . I should be staying in my home. I feel displaced for so long . . . I fear I will die without having a stable home and my children will not inherit my land or be able to marry wives [cannot afford paying bridewealth] but become slaves in people's farms and houses instead.

Border Troubles

It was a hot and windy day in late December 2014 when several people were sitting in Mr Kidega's hut near the border of Murchison Falls National Park. The

group included two *rwodi kweri* (village chiefs in charge of communal agricultural activities), several elders and youths – most of them men and all of them farmers – Lioba and her research assistants. Christopher was part of the group.

The group intended to walk along the border of the park to witness what had challenged the people since their return from the IDP camps. They had been full of hope for a better life; they had land to return to that was fertile and so they expected good harvests. But their hopes and initial successes in farming were soon dashed. They had not foreseen the amount of destruction that would be caused by big game, particularly elephants and buffaloes, crossing the park border and destroying people's crops.

Although the sun was already high in the sky, the group had not yet set off, because they could not agree whether or not to walk together with a UWA ranger. People stressed that 'UWA cares more about animals than us, who have to abandon our land because of elephants'. They also feared that the ranger could spot somebody from their village 'who is hunting his food' and 'accuse him of poaching'. After a lengthy discussion, they finally agreed that they would need the ranger not only for protection from potential attacks by wild animals but also to avoid being mistaken for poachers and shot. As the local chairman had explained to Lioba some days earlier, crossing the park border always poses a risk; people had disappeared in the park.

So, they linked up with the ranger, whom they met close to the park's Wangkwar Gate, and started their walk in the midday heat, first on footpaths and then cross-country through tall spear grass. Not surprisingly, on the way the ranger indeed spotted an old man about to place a trap. They requested that the ranger 'just forgive him' instead of taking legal action, arguing that they were walking for a different purpose. The ranger insisted on cautioning the old man and confiscated his *panga*, spear and snares. Along the way, elephants' footprints and paths were unmistakable, and so was the destruction of crops caused by them.

During the walk, the participants continuously discussed what they observed and finally drew a map to indicate physical features of the land, vegetation, land use patterns and occurrence of wild and domestic animals, and – most important – they noted problems and made recommendations. The major problems identified were wildlife, water and the UWA. Wildlife, in particular elephants, but also buffaloes and warthogs, were destroying people's crops with the effect that people had lost interest in farming and were therefore facing food shortages and a lack of money needed for satisfying other basic needs. People experienced water scarcity but were not allowed to use water from streams demarcating the park border. They were also not allowed to fish or to collect firewood or grass in the border area. The UWA's approach to dealing with so-called 'problem animals', such as digging trenches, planting chilli or smearing repellents made from chilli on ropes put around the fields, did not help. Rangers did not respond in time to 'problem animal' attacks, and there was no compensation for losses.

A heated discussion evolved around how to address these problems. An elder proposed that 'government should redistribute some elephants to other parks or sell them to other countries'. Another man recommended the provision of licensed guns to people and allowing them to kill one elephant, 'which would help to chase away others for 50 years'. A woman suggested the UWA should revise the park's management plan so that it provided for resource sharing (water, grass, fish, firewood). Others proposed to put up an electric fence around the park and suggested that rangers should not stay in their detach close to Wangkwar Gate but with the community so that they could quickly react to wildlife attacks. The UWA should facilitate trained scouts from the community, and government should pay compensation for losses. The ranger stressed, however, that elephants cannot be relocated to other parks; people cannot be allowed to kill elephants, because Uganda is a signatory to conventions for the protection of wildlife; and compensation cannot be paid, because it is not provided for by any legal Act. However, he said that resource sharing could be negotiated for special occasions, for instance funerals. He also stressed that rangers could not always respond as quickly as expected if called by people to chase away 'problem animals', because of lack of transport. By that time, they had only one motorbike and one car at their disposal.

Human-Wildlife Conflict, the Park and Development

When asked about human-wildlife conflict, one of the UWA rangers whom Lioba frequently met in Purongo explained that 'this is not a new thing, it started a long time ago, actually from Sudan', hinting at the Luo migration of about 1400–1500 AD. He stressed that 'what was initially a conflict between humans and animals has quickly become a conflict between humans' and referred to the widely known myth of the spear and the bead, which concerns a feud between the two brothers Labongo and Gipir, who became the founding fathers of the present-day Acholi and Alur. Their dispute started with an elephant raiding their garden that was chased away by Gipir, who had taken his brother's spear, and culminated in the separation of the Luo.

This was the beginning of the Acholi's repeated displacement, Lioba was told during a meeting with elders at the chief's place in March 2015. One elder recalled that already one hundred years ago the Acholi in this area were forced into camps by the colonialists. The reason given was the outbreak of sleeping sickness spread by tsetse flies. However, there were speculations that people actually had been displaced to pave the way for the development of a game reserve (Bunyoro-Gulu Game Reserve), which was indeed established in 1928, when people were still in the camps, and became Murchison Falls National Park in 1952. After their return, the park had become an unalterable fact that people had to accept – an area imagined and designed as an uninhabited, pristine wilderness and no longer a place for human settlement and farming and hunting

activities. During the war between the LRA and the government, which started in the mid-1980s and lasted until 2008, people had to stay in camps for years. And only a few years after their return from the camps they were displaced again by elephants.

The nearly 80-year-old Lajul Hely felt privileged to have been employed at Paraa Lodge in the park as early as 1959. He had worked in the Department of Housekeeping for almost 30 years and remembered that during colonial times most tourists had been Whites – British, Americans, Europeans – with a few Indians. He recalled the visit by the British Queen Elizabeth in 1954 and remembered that her daughter Princess Anne had also come. Lajul Hely explained: '[The park] was too expensive for Africans, who only started to come during the time of [president] Obote and Amin.' Obote promoted exclusive big game trophy hunting safaris for rich white professional hunters who were interested in killing leopards and huge tusker elephants. Amin's soldiers were after ivory and therefore killed thousands of elephants, but being army officers, they were not held accountable. It was the park, Lajul Hely told Lioba, that had paved the way for development. When the park was created, the trading centre developed. His father built the first house in the centre in 1952, which he used as a shop. In 1954, there were already seven buildings. The colonial government contracted people to build a road to connect Purongo with Pakwach, the next trading centre at that time. Ocaya Matino Martin was the first to use a pickup for business. In 1965, Ocan Lagoro bought a tractor. His son Ocan Jovan became the first miller and also opened one of the two big farms. The second one was owned by Oryema, then Inspector General of Police. However, with President Amin development stopped and only gained momentum a few years ago, after the end of the LRA war. 'Now, there are many farms and tractors in this area, and a lot of tourists are visiting the park, but who owns them [the farms and tractors], who benefits from them [the tourists]?' Lajul Hely asked. 'These are a few, but the majority has remained poor, despite the park or the big farms.'

During the time when people stayed in the IDP camps, the human population had nearly doubled and so did the elephant population, which had been seriously decimated at the time of Amin. Population growth had resulted in fierce competition between humans and wildlife over limited living space and resources. 'People's war was elephants' peace' – as one of Lioba's interlocutors put it; 'nobody disturbed them when they came to people's gardens and homes, and now they have become accustomed to the land that was vacant for so many years'.

Yet during a meeting in October 2016 at Purongo sub-county headquarters, the UWA warden stressed the value of wildlife protection for the sake of biodiversity and for attracting international tourists. He condemned poaching and illegal trade in wild animal meat, fur, body parts and ivory. However, he acknowledged that stray elephants and other big game had posed a problem to local people, and highlighted various methods to address it, such as scare shooting, digging

trenches, blowing whistles, keeping bees or burning bricks made from chilli and cow dung. He stressed that UWA had trained community volunteers, so-called UWA scouts, to assist the rangers in observing elephant movements and chasing away stray elephants. He advised that people should grow crops of no interest to elephants and marketable, such as chilli, garlic, ginger, okra or sunflowers, and to buy millet and other crops for their daily needs from the profits. This meeting had been one of a series of meetings to look for solutions to human-wildlife conflict, during which the same things were repeated again and again without producing tangible results. Besides these conventional approaches, the UWA had also endeavoured to make the local people benefit from conservation through a community tourism project. An 'Acholi Culture and Tourism Centre' was built from park entrance revenue sharing. It was intended to house a museum and restaurant and offer guided tours, thus providing livelihood alternatives to agriculture and at the same time being conducive to the protection of wildlife. However, the centre had not opened until years after the completion of the construction work; it had become an arena of competing interests and displays of power among sub-county and district officials and potential investors.

In December 2016, the Acholi Paramount Chief blamed stray elephants for continued poverty in those parts of the Acholi sub-region that border protected areas. In his view, the UWA had not done anything effective against stray elephants, so he suggested the Acholi people should deal with the problem themselves and kill the animals. However, some of the displaced people from Lawaca, about ten kilometres away from Purongo Trading Centre, had already taken matters into their own hands, although not in the way anticipated by the Chief and without asking for support from the UWA.

Self-Help

When visiting Lawaca in mid-August 2016, the first thing Lioba and her research assistants saw was a deserted homestead overgrown with grass. The open door of one of the dilapidated huts allowed a look at a simple mat on the floor, some clothes and blankets, a clay jug, a small jerry can, a cup, a basin, pots and plates. 'This is Mr Omony's home, which we now use for shelter when safeguarding our crops and harvests', Omony's nephew Simon Ocan explained. In 2010, Omony had moved to the trading centre together with his extended family after a group of elephants had destroyed all his crops in one night and nearly killed his wife when they tried to enter the hut where part of the produce was stored.

Simon, however, could not get used to life in the centre, the daily struggle for badly paid casual work and dependency on the goodwill of others. In 2015, he decided to engage in farming again and convinced a few relatives and friends, who were stranded in the trading centre like him, to return to their ancestral land. The idea was simple: people putting their adjacent fields together and growing the same crops in blocks – mainly marketable produce but also some crops

for subsistence needs – while patrolling in shifts and taking other coordinated measures against elephant invasions. 'During daytime, when elephants can be seen from far', he explained, 'it often helps to blow the *vuvuzelas* or beat jerry cans'. They also protected the crops with bells on pesticide-treated ropes around the blocks. However, at night one had to be alert. 'We are sleeping in makeshifts to wait for the elephants, we make fire and sit around and wait; one, three days, one week they are not coming, but you have to be ready any time', he said. They began experimenting with burning cow dung, tires and plastic materials and found that wild animals feared the smoke and smell. They also tried to use solar light to illuminate the fields at night, which turned out to be effective but rather expensive. Finally, they encouraged herdsmen from western Uganda to graze their cattle in the area, after having discovered that elephants do not like the natural smell and dung of domestic animals, nor the smell of cattle sprayed against ticks.

In the first year, the group had only seven members. In the second year, the number had increased to twenty households, and in early 2017, thirty-six households participated. The second year's harvest of sunflower, groundnuts, rice and watermelons was good, but marketing of produce was still a problem. The herdsmen's cattle had increased to 300 head, and they were allowed to stay longer, since cattle presence seemed to help. Although most of the farmers were still commuting between their homes in the trading centre and their makeshift shelters, they were optimistic that their model would work and allow them to come home one day.

Having heard about their successes, other people joined the group. One of them was Christopher Olum.

Of What Is This a Case?

Christopher Olum and the people of Purongo sub-county bordering Murchison Falls National Park, who shared their experiences with Lioba, are among many others living in the vicinity of protected areas who have to bear the costs of conserving Uganda's rich biodiversity in ten National Parks, numerous Wildlife Reserves and Sanctuaries and 506 Central Forest Reserves. The people from Ik County to which Timu Forest Reserve belongs and which borders Kidepo Valley National Park told Lotte similar stories. Underlying themes of these narrations are: the competition between people and wildlife and flora over land; disagreements over conservation goals, processes and procedures; and the close link between the practice of conservation and economic development.

Fortress Conservation

Uganda, with 18,783 recorded species of flora and fauna, is one of the most biodiverse countries in the world (NEMA 2016). The country's rich biodiversity

is related to its location, where several ecoregions with their typical communities of plants and animals in high altitude, forested, moist savannas and dryland and wetland biomes converge (Pomeroy et al. 2002: 7). However, Uganda lost an estimated 50 per cent of its overall biodiversity value between 1975 and 1995 (Pomeroy, Tushabe and Loh 2017: 1) and has shown a fairly constant loss rate of 1 per cent per year thereafter (NEMA 2016: 8). Main threats to biodiversity include over-harvesting and an unsustainable use of resources; habitat degradation and loss due to conversion into commercial land uses, particularly agriculture, logging, charcoal burning and mining; the recent discovery and exploration of oil and gas in the Albertine Rift; the introduction of alien species; and diseases and pollution. Many of these threats are caused by demographic pressure and poverty, leading to pressure on land. In addition, the effects of climate change have negatively impacted on biodiversity, as demonstrated by the increasing frequency of droughts, floods and mudslides. Additional concerns are encroachment on protected areas, human-wildlife conflicts and illegal wildlife trade (NEMA 2016: ix–x, 25–37).

To counter these threats to biodiversity, Uganda has adopted, among other measures, what has been called 'fortress conservation' by critics and a 'protectionist approach' by supporters, with protected areas managed by government agencies. This state-centric top-down approach aims to protect nature by excluding local people, who are suspected of using natural resources in irrational and destructive ways, thus causing biodiversity loss and environmental degradation (Doolittle 2007: 705). Fortress conservation is typically enforced by armed guards patrolling the borders of protected areas, imposing fines, arresting trespassers and in cases of poaching sometimes executing a shoot-on-sight policy.

Uganda's wildlife conservation legislation and policies vest ownership of wildlife in the government 'on behalf of, and for the benefit of, the people of Uganda' (Government of Uganda 2019: 12). Forest reserves are likewise held in trust by the government 'for the common good of the citizens of Uganda' (Government of Uganda 2003: 8). National laws regulating wildlife and forest conservation include the Ugandan Constitution of 1995, the Uganda Wildlife Statute of 1996, the National Forest Policy of 2001, the National Forestry and Tree Planting Act of 2003 and recent legislation such as the Uganda National Land Policy of 2013, the new National Environment Act of 2019 and the new Uganda Wildlife Act of 2019. Uganda joined the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) in 1991 and signed and ratified the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in 1992 and 1993 respectively.

The Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA), a government agency under the Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities, is responsible for the protection and sustainable development of wildlife populations within and outside protected areas. Wildlife laws and wildlife trade conventions are enforced by mil-

itarily trained game rangers, who vigorously pursue highly organized criminal poachers and subsistence hunters from communities neighbouring protected areas (UWA 2020).

The protection and sustainable development of forests gazetted as Central Forest Reserves (CFRs) is the responsibility of Uganda's National Forestry Authority (NFA) under the Ministry of Water and Environment. The NFA is mandated to '[m]anage Central Forest Reserves on a sustainable basis and to supply high quality forestry-related products and services to government, local communities and the private sector' (NFA 2020). NFA enforcement officers and police officers from the Environment Protection Police Unit, often with support of army personnel, are tasked with ensuring proper demarcation of forest reserves and the eviction of encroachers (Lumu 2017).

The UWA and NFA stress that the enforcement of the fortress or protectionist approach to the preservation of natural landscapes and endangered animal and plant species has been massively undermined by rural people living near protected areas in search of livelihoods and by illegal activities. Despite the remarkable increase in wildlife populations such as buffaloes, zebras, elephants and giraffes since the establishment of the UWA in the mid-1990s (UWA 2018: 15), wildlife is still threatened by people's encroachment into national parks and wildlife reserves and poaching for game meat, killing of elephants for ivory and pangolins for their scales, or pastoralists' poisoning of lions, leopards or hyenas in revenge for killing their livestock (UWA 2020). The condition of the forests is even more dramatic because the NFA has not always managed the forest reserves well; and in some areas according to neo-patrimonial practices (Petursson and Vedeld 2018). As a result, since 1990, Uganda has lost 400,000 hectares of its forest cover; and in 2017, nearly 98 per cent of the Central Forest Reserves had been encroached into by farmers and loggers involved in illegal cultivation, timber trade and charcoal production (Lumu 2017).

Competition between people and protected area authorities over land and natural resources is the main source of conservation conflicts. Internationally, there has been a paradigm shift from fortress conservation to 'new conservation'; this adds the goals of poverty alleviation and economic development to the conservation agenda and calls for decentralized, community-based approaches to be put in practice under an array of labels including Community Conservation, Integrated Conservation and Development Projects and Community-based Natural Resource Management. But Uganda has been largely untouched by this shift. Decades of violent conflict meant that rethinking conservation was not a political priority. With the establishment of the UWA in 1996 and NFA in 2003, and the formulation of new policies since the early 2000s, wildlife and forest conservation and management were no longer considered the responsibility of government alone. They were to be accomplished in partnership with district authorities, communities and the private sector (UWA 2020; NFA 2020). The

fortress approach has been softened to a certain extent by bringing 'conservation *with* the people', as Murphree (2000: 2) puts it, into play under the new hallmark of 'community participation', as stipulated in the new Wildlife Act of 2019 and the National Forestry and Tree Planting Act of 2003, not least because of the authorities' lack of management and enforcement capacities.

These new policies, however, do not imply that people and park and forest authorities have become equal partners. Uganda's approach to conservation has not reached the stage of 'community-*based* conservation' or 'conservation *by* the people' (Murphree 2000: 3, 5–6), which would imply collective management, use and controls on use of common pool resources and equitable benefit sharing at local levels by communal groups. Wildlife and central forests have remained the property of the state, are held in trust by the state for the people of Uganda, and UWA and NFA have the lead in wildlife and forest conservation and management within protected areas and, in the case of UWA, also on people's land, where a vast number of wild animals are found.

Displaced in the Name of Conservation

State-induced fortress conservation can be traced back to the 1872 establishment of the world's first national park, Yellowstone, which was imagined as a pristine wilderness to be preserved for future generations and ages (Brockington, Duffy and Igoe 2008: 18–19). For this to happen, the native Americans of the area were forcibly relocated, and the park was placed under the management of the US federal government, which hoped for investment and tourism.

The Yellowstone model of state-controlled and state-managed conservation, which is inevitably linked to the displacement of the local people, has greatly influenced conservation all over the world (Brockington and Igoe 2006). There are no statistics showing the overall number of people evicted from protected areas. However, estimates indicate that by the mid-2000s tens of millions of people, including up to fourteen million people in Africa (Agrawal and Redford 2009: 4), had become 'conservation refugees' (Dowie 2009). In Sub-Saharan Africa, conservation is the second most prominent and widespread reason why indigenous groups experience land alienation (Laltaika and Askew 2021: 104). Displacement in the name of conservation, like other forms of displacement, has taken the form of forceful eviction of local people from their land and dwellings and economic displacement through depriving them of their livelihoods by restricting access to or excluding them from certain areas (Cernea 2005: 48; Brockington and Igoe 2006: 425). Besides material loss of land, houses and livelihoods, conservation refugees have decried their symbolic obliteration from the landscape: 'their removal from its history, memory and representation' and loss of power and control over their environments (Brockington and Igoe 2006: 425).

European colonialism brought the model of protected areas with all its repercussions to Sub-Saharan Africa, where it has been adopted and remained largely unchanged by postcolonial governments (King 2010: 17–19). However, even in pre-colonial times, certain areas were set aside for various uses, including chiefs' hunting activities and 'conservation' purposes. Access was typically administered by chiefs and clan leaders on behalf of the communities (Bere in Girling 1960: 230–32; Gombya-Ssembajjwe, Abwoli and Bahati 2001). Animals were respected, and those that were considered as clan totems could not be killed by clan members (Roscoe 2015 [1911]). Specific trees regarded as sacred became places for performing rituals and sacrifices (Okello 2002). It was largely during the colonial and postcolonial periods that protected areas were separated from human settlement and people were displaced in the name of conservation (Banana, Nsita and Bomuhangi 2018; King 2010).

The first national park in Africa, Albert National Park (now Virunga National Park), was created in 1925 in Belgian Congo, followed by Kruger National Park in 1926 in South Africa under British colonial rule. Uganda's first national parks were established in the 1950s, when Uganda was a protectorate of the British Empire. One of the main drivers of early wildlife conservation efforts was the influence of powerful aristocratic big-game hunters. Their wish 'to preserve suitable specimen for their sport from the alleged depredations of Africans' (Brockington, Duffy and Igoe 2008: 47) marked the beginning of demarcating certain localities. Another important driver was the intention to preserve landscapes and protect 'the wilderness' from human interference 'to ensure that there is a "Big Out There" other to ourselves' (Brockington, Duffy and Igoe 2008: 48) – an oasis of peace and healing and a counterpoint to civilization with its supposed restlessness and destructive forces. In contemporary conservation discourses in Africa and elsewhere, the 'three particular obsessions of colonial views of nature' – the notion of wilderness, the issue of hunting and the desire to separate nature in protected areas from human interference – have endured (Adams 2003: 19). Protected areas have remained as much a place as an idea not only for the sake of biodiversity conservation but also because of the rich opportunities of marketing 'wild' spaces, things and experiences. The international hunting fraternity is still a powerful force behind conservation (Brockington, Duffy and Igoe 2008: 47–48). International environmental non-governmental organizations such as the World Wide Fund for Nature, which has been frequently associated with violent evictions, or the African Wildlife Foundation and the Wildlife Conservation Society do not only 'proselytise Western ideals of wilderness, people-less landscapes' but also control huge funds for conservation and therefore have great influence in local contexts (Brockington and Igoe 2006: 443).

The creation of forest reserves is a slightly different story compared to national parks and game reserves. At the advent of colonialism, the state became

the master of forests, which were divided into protected areas and reserves (Barrow et al. 2016: 136). In Uganda, the British colonial administration declared most of the land, including large areas of woodlands and forests, as Crown Land, from which people could be evicted any time, and which could only be accessed for subsistence by people with so-called 'privileges'. Some of the forest dwellers such as the Batwa, Ik and Benet were allowed to continue residing in the forests, but only as a privilege, not a right (Banana, Nsita and Bomuhangi 2018). Furthermore, because of epidemics such as sleeping sickness, rinderpest and smallpox, communities were resettled to other places (Banana, Nsita, and Bomuhangi 2018). In the areas they left behind, the number of wild animals increased, and the vegetation spread, and some of these areas were then declared reserves. Consequently, the displaced people could not return. Forests were mainly maintained to produce timber, and the 1947 Forest Act confirmed the local people's 'privileged access' to the reserves for collecting dry wood and water but denied them rights to other resources or to settlement. In some areas, the boundary delineation of private land, game and forest reserves led to violent displacement of small-scale farmers. Upon independence in 1962, the Uganda Land Commission took over the management of former Crown Land and the forest reserves were managed by the Forest Department.

Striking examples of forcible evictions of local people from forests and parks in postcolonial Uganda are the Benet, the Batwa and the Ik, many of them now living in abject poverty on the fringes of national parks and nearby towns. The Benet were displaced from Mount Elgon Forest in 1983, when Mount Elgon National Park was created, and had to face repeated expulsions between 1990 and 2004 (MRG 2014). The Batwa were expelled from their ancestral land in the early 1990s to make way for Bwindi Impenetrable Forest National Park, Maghinga Gorilla National Park and Semuliki National Park (MRG 2020) created to save the mountain gorillas. Apaa in northern Uganda is another case that repeatedly made the headlines. After the local Acholi people left the IDP camps following twenty years of war, they returned to what they claimed to be their customary land; but the UWA considered it to be part of East Madi Wildlife Reserve gazetted in 2002 when people were still displaced. Continuous violent evictions by the UWA and national army that cost many lives were met with fierce resistance and accusations that the UWA and investors were grabbing the people's ancestral land (Lenhart 2013; Otto 2017).

There are many less spectacular, less known and less documented cases of uncounted conservation refugees in Uganda, including the case of Christopher, his fellow farmers and their forefathers from Purongo. Another case is Ik subsistence farmers, hunters and gatherers and Dodoth pastoralists, who were evicted from Kidepo valley in 1958, when the area – which after independence became Kidepo Valley National Park – was gazetted as a game reserve by the colonial government (Turnbull 1972). Their displacement implied that all Ik had to live in

the Morungule and Timu mountains and farm the steep and ecologically fragile mountain slopes (Meinert, Willerslev and Seebach 2017). They became extra vulnerable to hunger during the dry season and during years of prolonged drought because they were left with very few options for collecting wild fruits and honey and hunting game meat that would have provided them with sufficient vitamins and proteins. Their practice of small-scale hunting and gathering was now considered poaching and transgressing, and members of the Ik community often tell stories of how people who entered the national park were killed by park rangers. Not only were the Ik displaced from Kidepo valley when the park was established, but so were the pastoralist Dodoth, who from then on were prevented from grazing their animals and engaging in small-scale hunting in this area. Some Dodoth began to take their cattle, goats and sheep to the Morungule and Timu mountains, which the Ik considered their home and territory for subsistence farming, hunting and gathering, but not suitable for grazing large numbers of animals. Other Dodoth took their cattle further south and clashed with other pastoralist groups over access to water and pasture. Thus, the displacement caused by the establishment of Kidepo Valley National Park increased inter-ethnic tensions and contributed to the escalation of cattle conflicts between various Karamojong pastoralist groups in the following decades. Today, the Ik and Dodoth live as neighbours and in some areas in mixed communities in a precarious harmony that can easily be disturbed due to competition over land and natural resources (Gade, Willerslev and Meinert 2015).

Conservation and Development

In Uganda (and elsewhere), excluding local people from protected areas, depriving them of their livelihoods and denying them viable aspects of their identity related to land goes hand in hand with letting others in. In the case of national parks and game reserves, these are photo safari tourists, trophy hunters and private investors building and running lodges or organizing tours. In the case of forest reserves, they are concessionaires planting trees, logging and cultivating inside forest reserves; as well as tourists and tour operators in some of the forests. Wilderness – be it landscapes and 'wilderness experiences' or 'wilderness products' such as wildlife, timber, charcoal, medicinal herbs and the like – is something that sells and has proven to be a key driver of Uganda's economy.

The Ugandan government strongly woos solvent tourists and hotel and tour operators who have shown interest in national parks and wildlife reserves (Musoke 2019), as tourism is the country's fastest growing economic sector, leading foreign currency earner and important source of employment. In 2018/19, 1.5 million people visited Uganda, spent US$ 1.6 billion in the country and contributed 7.7 per cent to the gross domestic product (Wadero 2019). Of them, 325,000 were 'leisure tourists' attracted by scenic landscapes and iconic wildlife

species and interested in gorilla or chimpanzee tracking, game drives, bird watching, boat cruises on the Nile or sport hunting (UBOS 2019: 105–6).

In the case of forests, tourism also plays a certain, albeit minor, role. Some of Uganda's remaining natural forests such as Kibale Forest and Bwindi Forest have become national parks managed by the UWA, where tourists have the chance to observe gorillas and chimpanzees in their natural habitat (UWA 2020). Other forests managed by the NFA as Central Forest Reserves (CFRs) also attract tourists, including Mabira Forest, Budongo Forest and Mpanga Forest, where activities such as forest walks, mountain biking or bird and butterfly watching are offered. These forest-tourism sites have been developed in collaboration with the private sector (NFA 2020). However, only a few CFRs have a significant proportion of natural forest stands. The majority consist largely of forest plantations, mainly of pine and eucalyptus species for commercial timber production, which are exploited by the NFA and private investors to be sold on domestic and international markets. The same applies to other wood and non-wood forest products such as fuel wood, charcoal, rattan and honey, as well as to cash crop plantations inside CFRs (UBOS 2019: 115).

Wildlife and trees that have been turned into commodities as 'renewable resources' (UWA 2018: 45) attract domestic and foreign investment and are integrated into global value chains with support from key global players including the World Bank, World Trade Organization, World Wide Fund for Nature and others. They are considered a promising path to economic development while simultaneously paying for the costs of conservation. However, the local population has played only a marginal role in such a vision of development. Some provisions for them are made in the Wildlife Act of 2019, which affords not only public-private partnerships but also 'community conservation' in the form of sharing of revenue generated from national parks and game reserves with local communities, as well as wildlife use rights on communal and private land, including hunting or ranching of wildlife, trading in wildlife and wildlife products, and using wildlife for tourism and recreation (Uganda Wildlife Act 2019: Sections 22, 35, 51 and 65). The Act also states the new provision of compensation for damages including death, injury, destruction of crops and property caused by certain wildlife species outside protected areas (Uganda Wildlife Act 2019: Sections 82, 83, 84 and Fourth Schedule). Similarly, the National Forestry and Tree Planting Act of 2003 provides for collaborative management of central and local forest reserves by 'a responsible body and a forest user group'; and for issuing licences to interested persons or entities for 'cutting, taking, working or removing of forest produce from a forest reserve or community forest' (National Forestry and Tree Planting Act 2003, Part II, Section 5, Part IV, Section 41 and Part V).

In the case of national parks and wildlife reserves, at present, community conservation mainly takes the form of sharing of revenue from park entrance fees and from the use of wildlife outside protected areas, mostly sport hunting.

Usually, the 20 per cent revenue of park entrance fees is spent on local infrastructure – e.g. solar panels for schools, classroom blocks, health centres, roads or bridges – as well as community projects intended to offer an alternative to agriculture in areas highly affected by human-wildlife conflict, such as bee hive projects for honey production or community-based eco-tourism projects. However, our research among communities neighbouring Murchison Falls National Park and Kidepo Valley National Park and studies carried out in the border areas of Bwindi Impenetrable National Park in south-western Uganda (Ahebwa, Van der Duim and Sandbrook 2012; Tumusiime and Vedeld 2012) show that the benefits of the 20 per cent revenue do not at all outweigh losses from physical and economic displacement, nor do they compensate for crop raiding by hungry elephants and other wildlife. The findings also reveal that prior to 2012, the revenue sharing policy had not been implemented. This only changed with UWA's concerted awareness-raising of new Revenue Sharing Guidelines (UWA 2011) at that time, which focused on putting the responsibility for selecting projects funded through UWA's Revenue Sharing Fund in the hands of the people by setting up Parish Development and Parish Procurement Committees tasked with planning and managing the money. However, despite the UWA's intention to decentralize 'decision making and action to the lowest levels possible' and minimize 'Revenue Sharing Fund dissipation' (UWA 2011: 2), the 20 per cent – a rather minimal amount compared to the total revenue from park tourism – has often not reached the targeted people. This may be due to the fact that projects have to be approved by the UWA, and local government officials are in charge of receiving funds and allocating the money. In Purongo and Bwindi (Tumusiime and Vedeld 2012; Lenhart 2023), people lamented that the authorities would only pay lip service to people's participation in decision-making and did not actually want to relinquish power and lose control. They accused UWA personnel on the ground and members of local government of misappropriating funds and blamed them for corruption, nepotism and fraud.

In the case of forests, local people's views and needs are seldom given priority; or local people are not even considered as partners, as demonstrated by the case of the Ik living in the area of Timu forest. In 2017, the private company 'Inspire Africa' – a 'human capital organisation', as the organization calls itself, with the mission 'to create and empower fresh generations of African entrepreneurs with practical entrepreneurial experience, while extending to them practical business exposure and mentorship' (Inspire Africa 2017) – started a coffee plantation project inside Timu Forest Reserve with funding from the Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF 3). Groups of local young people were given coffee seedlings to plant between the trees, where they were expected to thrive, and were promised benefit from the future harvest. The idea behind the project, according to one of the coordinators, was to replace illegal subsistence farming in the forest reserve with coffee production, thus contributing to preserving the forest while

simultaneously creating a cash crop livelihood alternative for the youth. However, the farmers who had their gardens taken over by the coffee project obviously felt threatened. Moreover, ploughing the fields with a tractor, compared to the farmers' way of digging between the trees with hand hoes, reshaped the forest scape rather than protecting it. The NFA had not approved the coffee plantation inside the forest reserve but shared the logic of the implementers that it followed national development plans for modernization of agriculture by transforming subsistence agriculture into commercial farming. At the same time and place, the NFA ran a reforestation and tree planting programme, which was also not well received locally, because the trees were not only planted by prisoners from the district prison and not by locals but were also planted in people's gardens. These two attempts to promote 'conservation through development' were, to some extent, doomed to fail from the beginning because the implementers had not actively involved the local people, who depended on the land for their livelihoods. In contrast, Budongo forest in western Uganda is a more promising example. Here the forest authorities successfully changed their management strategy by combining the conventional protectionist approach with the conservation through development approach to focus on multiple-use forest management involving local people (Babweteera et al. 2018).

Just Conservation: A Conclusion

Christopher Olum and the people of Purongo, the Ik and many others affected by wildlife and forest conservation conflicts in Uganda are questioning the state's top-down approach, with protected areas at its centre, and with government deciding on conservation affairs and its agencies UWA and NFA having the lead in implementing programmes and projects and enforcing conservation laws in cooperation with other security organs. The Ugandan authorities argue that they have a mandate as custodians of wildlife inside and outside national parks and game reserves and of trees and other forest products inside Central Forest Reserves. On the one hand, they are tasked with protecting the country's rich biodiversity for present and future generations; on the other hand, they are obliged to contribute towards driving forward Uganda's economic development by selling wildlife experiences in the savannah landscape to tourists, and trees and other forest products to concessionaires.

Having realised that communities and individuals will only protect wildlife and forests when they also benefit from conservation, the state has recently expanded its approach to include 'community conservation' mainly in the form of sharing revenue from park entrance fees. However, our case studies, as well as research conducted among communities neighbouring national parks and forest reserves in other parts of the country, reveal that the introduction of 'community conservation' has not changed the relationship between the local people and the

conservation agencies, which has remained tense and characterized by mistrust. In large part, this is because people lost their land and houses, access to vital livelihood resources, family homes and cultural space in the name of conservation. Some were forcefully evicted from their land to create national parks and forest reserves, as in the case of the Ik, Batwa and Benet. Others were displaced 'first by the colonialists and now your [UWA's] elephants', as the people from Purongo used to complain to the UWA rangers and wardens from Murchison Falls National Park. Revenues largely remain with government and private investors, who obtain concessions for running lodges and operating tours within national parks and opening plantations within Central Forest Reserves. The local people were not compensated for their losses and received limited, if any, economic returns from this marketing of the 'wilderness'. They experienced food insecurity, psychological stress and social and economic downward mobility – a fate they share with people who have undergone other forms of development-induced displacement (Cernea and Schmidt-Soltau 2003; Cernea 2005; Agrawal and Redford 2009; Laltaika and Askew 2021).

Christopher and the people of Purongo repeatedly emphasized exactly these points (Lenhart 2023). Being neighbours of a national park, they said they felt neglected by a government 'that cares more about animals than us' and that has chosen to rigorously protect wildlife, not least because of the benefits accruing from conservation and the selling of 'wilderness experiences' to tourists in collaboration with their private sector allies. They stressed that they had to bear the brunt of conservation, facing hunger and poverty caused by crop raiding of hungry elephants crossing the park border and being accused of poaching when hunting in their customary hunting grounds in the border area of the national park. They were sometimes subjected to arbitrary arrests and mistreatment, and even murder and disappearances were reported. However, unjust outcomes and unfair treatment were not their only concern. They also emphasized that their voices were not heard, not even when they tried to involve higher authorities, including their elected representatives in parliament. They bemoaned the lack of recognition and exclusion from decision-making on issues that fundamentally affect their lives.

The grievances of Christopher and many other people in Purongo, Ikland and elsewhere in Uganda concerning land and land use, trust and governance in the context of conservation point to the violation of the three intertwined dimensions of social justice: outcome justice, or the fair sharing of resources, benefits and costs of conservation; procedural justice or ways of achieving a fair outcome based on participation in and the fairness of decision-making processes; and recognition or respect for difference and avoidance of domination (Martin 2017). Conservation in Uganda has to a greater or lesser extent undermined not only existing livelihoods but also lifeworlds, which have been moulded over centuries through specific ways of living on, from and with the land. The long-established

'fortress' or 'protectionist' approach has turned local hunters into 'poachers' and gatherers of firewood, fruits and berries into 'thieves'. It has also disregarded the social and spiritual dimensions of land as a source of identity, belonging, generational succession and locus of ritual acts. The more recent 'conservation as development' paradigm – contrary to its intention – has perpetuated some of the negative distributional effects on the communities. People like Christopher – who were largely excluded from decision-making in the context of 'community conservation', lost trust and confidence in the conservation agencies and withdrew from any dialogue with their representatives on the ground – finally took matters in their own hands – in some cases, as happened in Lawaca, with some success. However, generally, withdrawal of an affected population makes it even less likely that their voices will be heard and their needs recognized, which will further worsen their position in terms of distribution.

A decisive factor for just conservation is conservation governance. In Uganda, the top-down approach of state-controlled and state-managed conservation has reduced community participation largely to the state's sharing of a rather small amount of revenue with neighbours of protected areas to be invested in community projects, instead of making it a community demand-driven approach with activities planned and developed in a participatory process. This would have required devolution of certain rights and obligations to the communities, which has not happened. The local people at the end of a chain of vertical power and interests related to wildlife and forests – central government with its agencies UWA and NFA, local governments at the district and sub-district levels, private investors and communities – have remained the ones least involved in decision-making processes. They receive the smallest share of profits, even though they are the ones who suffer disproportionately from the negative impacts of conservation. Rather, in a context of 'neo-liberally inspired commoditization of natural resources' (Bollig 2016: 771), government has courted the private sector interested in tourism and trade as partners. These actors have created and maintained an image of conservation intended to make it a market hit. They are the ones in control of conservation affairs, driven by influential international conservation actors such as the World Wide Fund for Nature and supported by global economy key players including the World Bank.

Thus, some thorny questions concerning the practice of conservation in Uganda and elsewhere remain to be answered. Who should benefit from conservation and who will be at the losing end: the state and tourists, the local people and rural poor, or animals and trees? How can social justice be achieved for those who are most affected by potentially negative repercussions of conservation? What are best practices in devolving conservation rights and obligations from the state to local communities so as to realize social justice and foster economic development, without compromising the welfare of wildlife and forests? Can this be achieved in the context of global capitalism, which transforms nature

into commodities of trade? Finding answers to these questions is not an easy endeavour, and answers will differ depending on whether it is the protection and preservation of wildlife and landscapes or interventionist forest resource management. However, the insight that just conservation cannot only be about doing justice to people but must include doing justice to nature to achieve ecological sustainability applies to both.

Our case studies on conservation conflicts show the fierce competition between humans and wildlife and trees for land. All need access to land for survival and suffer from displacement. Land is a place of close relationships. Plants, animals, humans, minerals and water are important to each other and interdependent. They constitute a 'biotic community', as Leopold put it in his essay on land ethics (Leopold 1987 [1949]: 204). In the context of conservation, striving for justice for people, particularly the most disadvantaged groups, should be a matter of course. However, we also experience the tremendous loss of biodiversity, alarming degradation of ecosystems and destruction of landscapes in Uganda and worldwide (WWF 2018) with their severe consequences for mankind. Thus, if justice for people is at the expense of the non-human, neither social nor ecological justice will be achieved. However, a transformed self-conception of people as part of the land's biotic community would not only lead to a greater acceptance of nature conservation but would also encourage greater political efforts to ensure that nature conservation benefits the well-being of all – non-human and human – parts of this community.

Lioba Lenhart, Ph.D., was Associate Professor at the Institute of Peace and Strategy Studies, Gulu University (2009–2021) and is now Programme Advisor for Participatory Transformation of Land Conflicts in Northern Uganda, Civil Peace Service Programme, German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and GIZ.

Lotte Meinert, Ph.D., is Professor at the Department of Anthropology, Aarhus University.

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