

# TRUST



# *Optic*







# CONTENT

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- *BMCT and Partners Unite for Batwa.*
- *Education milestone .*
- *Batwa careers day.*
- *COVID19 call.*
- *The model village.*





# *editors message*

Welcome to the TRUST optic., the in-room magazine of Bwindi Mgahinga Conservation Trust (BMCT). We are always pleased to share with you the works that BMCT engages in to contribute towards the conservation efforts in Uganda. We are present in three districts of Kisoro, Kanungu and Rubanda but also respond to conservation calls in other areas of the country.



The TRUST reaches out to those in need and brings a smile to them. We bring you the first issue of the TRUST optic, full of heart moving stories and our activities happening in the BMCA.

Our social media platforms are always updated with our activities. We have received feedback from some of you and we appreciate your responses and engagements. Your feedback is very helpful and much appreciated.

I invite you to learn about bamboo growing and its products and how skills trainings are impacting the lives of batwa youth and other members of the Society. We have partnerships that yield much fruit as we focus on meaningful activities that support and meet the needs of people.

As COVID19 set in, we saw a number of families suffer from hunger especially casual labourers. We have supported the community around Bwindi but continue to appeal to you to support our activities to surge our capacity to respond to other areas where we haven't reached.

The trust has experienced some difficulties in this period of COVID19 like any other organisation as its investment fund has dropped really low, however our optimism is founded on the developments that we invested with the community over time.

It's thrilling to share from my heart the stories around our communities.





# Trust Administrators Message

It is with great pleasure that I have an opportunity to share with you our esteemed readers the first issue of the TRUST optic.

On behalf of the Board, Management, members and Volunteers of Bwindi Mgahinga Conservation Trust (BMCT), I thank all our partners for the support towards our work. Through partnerships, collaboration and co-ordination, we have been able to reach the most vulnerable and offer meaningful support to the people we serve.

BMCT was established under the Uganda Trust Act in 1994, as a registered Conservation Trust Fund mandated to support conservation of Mgahinga Gorilla National Park (MGNP) and Bwindi Impenetrable National Park (BINP) and contribute to uplifting the livelihoods of the people in communities adjacent to these national parks.

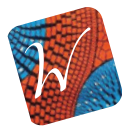
*BMCT Vision.* To conserve the bio-diversity and ecosystem health of Mgahinga and Bwindi protected areas in harmony with the development needs of the surrounding communities.

*BMCT Mission:* To foster conservation of bio-diversity in Mgahinga and Bwindi protected areas through investment in community development projects, grants for research and ecological monitoring, funding park management and protection, and programmes that create greater conservation awareness. BMCT implement its Mission through making grants to UWA, ITFC and community groups and direct activity implementation.

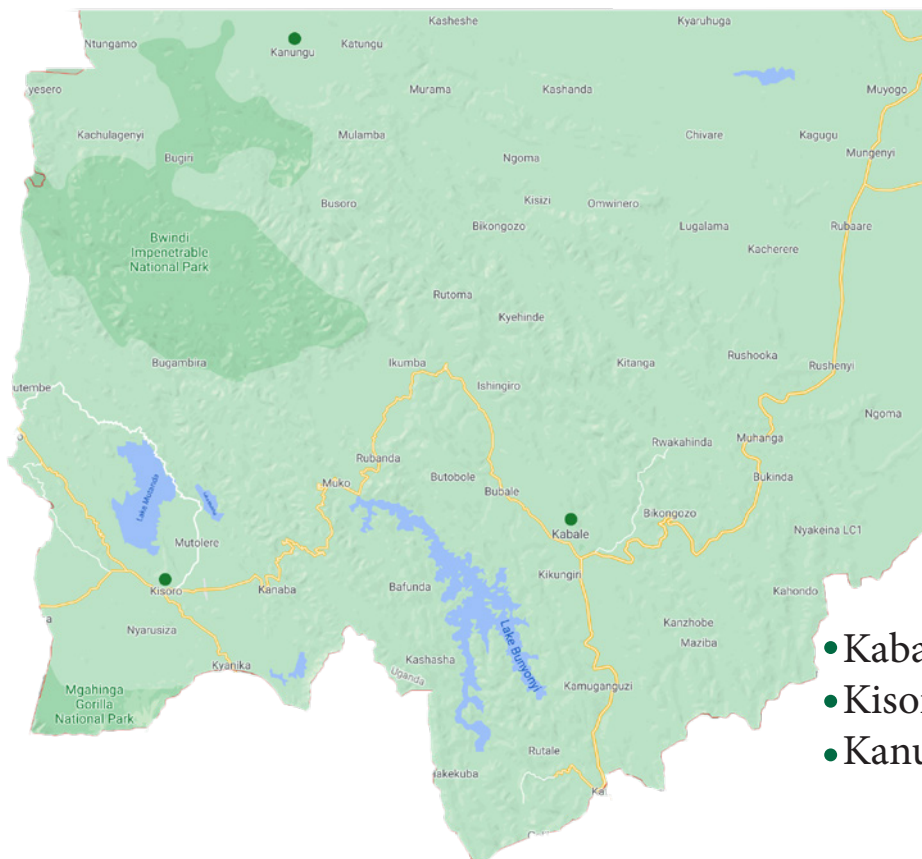
*Our Philosophy* recognizes that people are an important part of any ecosystem. It further recognizes that without healthy and economically secure communities around Bwindi and Mgahinga protected areas, the area remains under threat from grazing, hunting and such vices. In response, BMCT uses a unique approach of conservation through community development to achieve its vision. BMCT works to improve the quality of life in surrounding communities by providing education, health services, safe water, vocational training and sustainable resource use skills in this impoverished and most densely populated region in Uganda.

Celebrating 25 years of presence in Uganda, we have provided long-term reliable support for projects promoting research, sustainable use of natural resources and offered meaningful livelihoods for people surrounding the two parks. In partnering with the community, BMCT has been working with the Local Council Steering Committee (LCSC) to fund community projects that are mainly geared towards conservation. Over time, BMCT funding has benefitted over 2000 families in livelihood ventures, over 500 youths in different vocational skills and other community members in the area of operation.





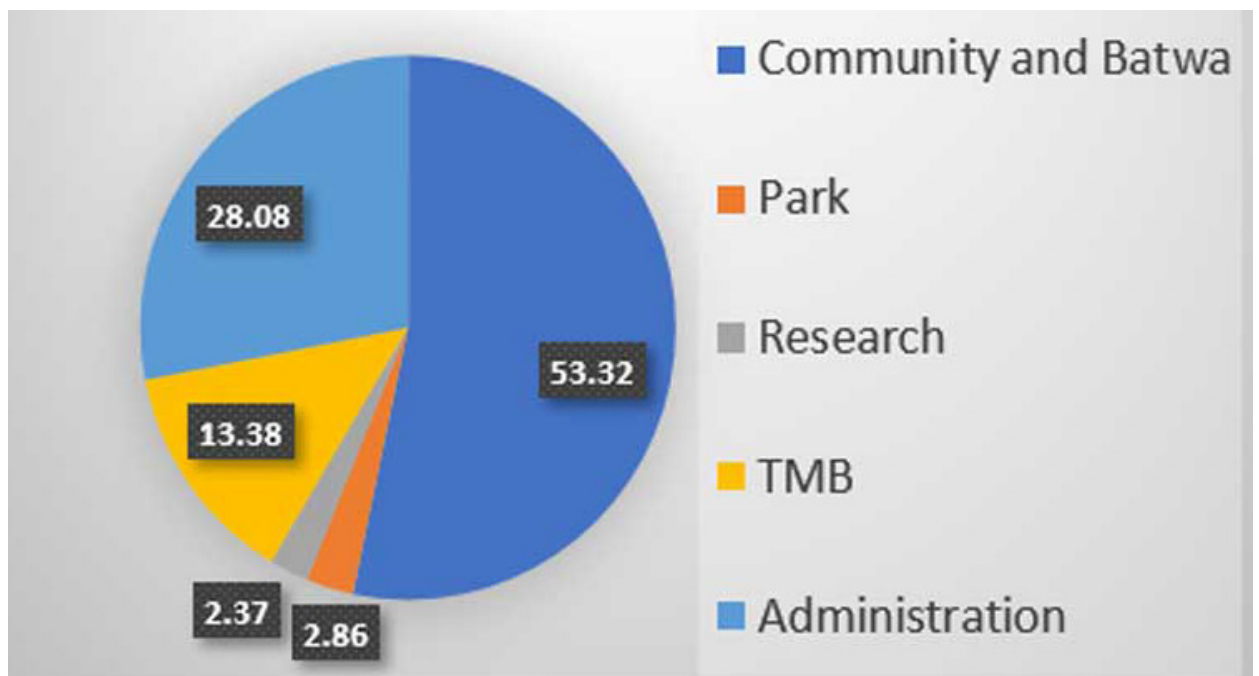
# here we work



- Kabale
- Kisoro
- Kanungu



# Expenditure Per Sector





# *Education as Reality*





BMCT's education program mainly targets the batwa families that are less privileged in education access. We employ a holistic approach where children receive tuition, scholastic materials, medical care and psychosocial support enabling them to succeed in life. The family approach includes parents being engaged in ensuring that their children complete education through availing them a conducive environment for studying, visiting those that are in boarding schools. In relation to conservation, schools keep the children and youth on an education mission barring them from engaging in illegal activities like poaching.

This education support that has been implemented for 12 years now, BMCT supports them through a scholarship scheme where it pays 100% tuition, provides uniform and other scholastic materials, sanitary pads for girls, provide lunch for day scholars and pay medical fees for all sponsored children.

The sponsorship is for primary, secondary, vocational and tertiary levels. By 2015, the cumulative number of batwa children that BMCT supports has reached 6,065 in the three districts of BMCT operation. (see annex1)

The program reached a major milestone in 2019, when it got its first female mutwa graduate Scolah Tumwebaze with a bachelor's degree in social work and social administration. She is currently employed with BMCT as a batwa focal person.

# *Its tough choosing what to pursue in education,*

Just like Mothers teach their babies to walk, Professionals teach the unprofessional on Careers Day

Before batwa commence their first term of every year, they are treated to a professionals meet for counsel. This decision was informed by BMCT's Assessment 2016, where we established some of the contributing factors to a high drop out rate of batwa children from school. The most pressing reasons from the research included; Studying on an empty stomach (21%), Marginalization at school (21%), Batwa Life style (18%), Early marriages/unwanted pregnancies (6%) and Lack of role models in homes and community (11%).

To bridge the lack of role models, Batwa children from University, vocational institutions, secondary and upper primary schools all converge for a careers day. The first edition was held at BMCT- Kabale compound premises and ten (10) speakers including District Education Officers, Community Representatives, Local Government staffs, a life skills trainer and parents were invited to grace the day. The event provided Batwa students with an opportunity to explore careers of their interest by visiting different career booths and speaking to individuals working in the fields of their interest. The educationists helped the students make informed decisions for subject choices after discussing and analysing with them their knowledge capabilities and future interests. The vocational students were helped to weigh the marketability of the skills they would want to take before they undertake them.

Alongside the career's day is a life skills practical session which allows Batwa students to discover their values, strengths, talents and weaknesses and that the decisions they make as young people concerning their education would have an everlasting impact on their lives positively or negatively. It affects their further education, training or employment, social lives, finances, health outcomes first at individual level, family and also the entire batwa community.

The continued engagement of the students in this career's day session is to monitor and evaluate the purpose and progress of their education choices. If along the way someone has a change of mind or encounters a challenge, it is through these sessions that we help them as an organisation.





# COVID-19 call

The outbreak of Corona virus (COVID 19) greatly affected the socio-economic status of most communities around the national parks but worst were the Batwa. Traditionally dependant on earning from tourism activities like entertainment, the parks were no longer receiving any visitors thus affecting the income earning of the batwa. Other batwa that work on bakiga farms on a “food for work” basis were also going hungry as their employers decided to store their farm produce for hard times.

BMCT had to assist these households and as such, we delivered food parcels to 413 households in Kisoro District, 180 Households in Kanungu district and 188 households in Rubanda District. These assorted products that included 8 tons of maize flour, 781 bars of soap, beans and cooking oil were delivered to the Resident District Commissioners (RDC's) office as the head of the COVID-19 task force.

The deputy RDC Kisoro District while officiating the handover of these items commended the job being done by BMCT and other Non-Government Organizations who have given a hand in helping communities survive through this difficult condition.

The RDC Rubanda District Mr. Rwakifari Peter thanked BMCT for the good work of uplifting the livelihood standards of people living near the parks and the Batwa in particular.





*Livelihoods to*



*Empower Communities*





A market-oriented agricultural program that creates employment for youth and women in agribusiness while ensuring household food security has been realised. BMCT works with farmers in a Farmer Field School (FFS) setting where each FFS group receives an assortment of seeds that they are expected to multiply and use both for food and sell. Such seeds include but not limited to Irish potatoes, vegetables, fruit trees among others. The groups have also been trained in planting trees like caliantra, graviera and bamboo that are used for soil stabilisation. By 2019, 102,500 Caliantra trees, 10,300 bamboo rhizomes, 400 graviera seedlings have been given to 10 FFS groups in the three districts of operation.

The most successful agri-business venture that BMCT farmers have engaged in is bee keeping.

Partnering with communities, BMCT continues to conserve the environment while decreasing the vulnerability of households surrounding Bwindi and Mgahinga parks. In providing them with income generation activities (IGAs) especially in farming, families have managed to sustain their lives and desist from depleting the national parks. Such IGAs include livestock like cows, goats, sheep and pigs that multiply quickly. Products like milk are sold to cater for other family needs while the animal waste is used for manure in their gardens.









# *Skills training for employment*

Funded by UNDP is a market driven program designed to address challenges in eco-tourism by creating employment opportunities for the youth and women. Trainings in bamboo products making like bamboo baskets, furniture, utensils, jewelry and hotel/office accessories e.g lampshades, table mats, document trays etc has been on-going for 3years now. Those who are already skilled have been able to sell their bamboo products to hotels like Clouds hotel but they also receive on average 20 orders per month.

Clay products and crafts making trained by Kwetu arts has enabled women to gain skills in both clay products making and crafts. These products include clay jewelry, ceramic products, baskets, office/hotel accessories. With a conservationist mind, the training takes care not to use products that deplete the environment. Such caution includes making different colours using natural plants. These trainings have empowered more than 4,000 women and youth with practical and entrepreneurial skills to create employability and competences relevant to the labor market.





## *Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLA)*

BMCT with funding from CARE International in Uganda implements two projects among the Batwa community. The Health Education and Agriculture Livelihoods (HEAL) has had two phases. The first phase of the project started in 2012 while the 2nd phase started in 2014. Although the project is now run through monitoring of the formulated VSLA groups, it had very enriching results for Batwa especially under the VSLA methodology. Targeting Batwa women and girls aged 14-49 years, the project has helped integrate Batwa with non-Batwa community members as they meet in the saving groups.

In the second phase of the project HEAL II, the housing component was added to benefit of the Batwa communities. This included construction of better housing facilities for Batwa families.

Through the VSLA saving groups, there are majorly two benefits that have accrued to the Batwa.

Empowerment in decision making due to Batwa's inclusion on VSLA executive committees. This has empowered them to have their voices heard as well as improving their self-esteem. They are now able to contribute to decision making on group matters. 26 groups out of 40 included Batwa on executive committees

Tremendous Improvement in savings: Both the Batwa and the non-Batwa developed a saving culture. Everybody in a group strived to look for money to save on a weekly basis unlike before the introduction of VSLA methodology where nobody bothered to save.

Sofar, we have trained 102 groups that have since birthed other 12 groups. These new groups are not under BMCT supervision but they say they were trained by BCMT CBTs. However, the COVID19 shocks are visible as members have started defaulting on the loans taken. It is a challenging time for the group members who have been united by a saving culture.

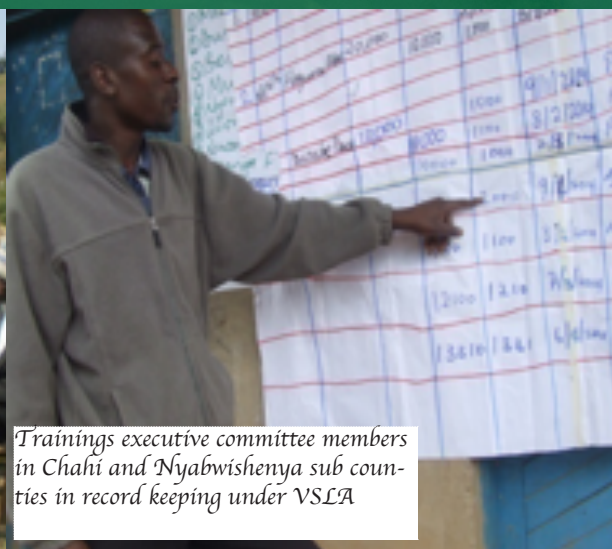
The hearts are warm, here is what some VSLA members had to say during our recent visit

“We have for a long time been poor due to lack of a saving culture. In the past we used to work for some little funds to buy food but the surplus would be misused in over drinking. We are now proud and empowered since the introduction of VSLA. Currently I have learnt to save on a weekly basis through our VSLA group. We are happy that our VSLA group is led by a Mutwa as a chairperson. This is a sign of respect and trust from the non-Batwa who have entrusted us to also be among the leaders. I borrowed 20,000 (twenty thousand shillings) from our VSLA group bought chicken which hatched 9 chicks, of which six are ready to lay eggs. I’m going to generate money from sale of eggs and chicken thus improve my household income. Said Norah a member of Nyabaremura Batwa Tukore group

Being a member of VSLA group has helped me to have a saving culture. I have a steady income in my home because I borrow and invest in IGA’s. In December 2013, I borrowed 20,000 from my VSLA group bought a tin of carrot seed planted it. When I harvested and sold the carrots I got 120,000 in a period of three months. I’m proud of being a member of a VSLA group” Said Mebro a member of Abizera group in Nyakabande sub county group



*Mukungu Tukwasikanye and Kagano A Duterimbere groups sharing out*



*Trainings executive committee members in Chahi and Nyabwishenya sub counties in record keeping under VSLA*

# The Team Behind the wheels



*Irene Tumushabe*

"Our offices started from Kanjokya street before we shifted here" Irene Tumushabe fondly reminisces about BMCT's journey. As an office assistant in the Kampala office, Irene can talk about the change of guards at the organisation. "Interacting with the organizational clients and our tenants makes my day a blessing". She enjoys meeting new people and can never skip a Sunday without attending church



*Kakuru*

The program Manager, Kakuru phares has been working with BMCT for six years now. Recruited as an MSE officer, Phares has risen through the ranks to the managerial post he holds currently. A committed community person, Kakuru is a gem among community members in the BMCT area of operation. He has been at the forefront of supporting livelihood projects. "I love climbing mountains and so far I already conquered mount Muhabura and Sabinjo. I am currently warming up for Mt. Elgon as soon as this COVID19 is out of the way



*Agatha*

Agatha aka "Chairman" has been working with BMCT for 20years. As an office assistant, she has many responsibilities which include but not limited to receiving visitors, interacting with the organizational tenants, meeting the children at school. We call her 'Chairman' As such if she has not given you permission, you cannot enter the office premises"



*Eunice Barisimaki*

Eunice Barisimaki is the trust secretary. She is one of the pioneer employees of BMCT. So principled and always encouraging people along their work likes. We call her our "shwenkazi".

She is also a nutritionist who is always particular about what she eats as she says eating healthy is a must for everyone.

"I like kitenge so much" will always be her answer when asked about fashion that appeals to her



*Mercy Naturinda*

Mercy Naturinda is the Partnerships Officer, She sits in the Kampala and is responsible for building the image of the organization. Passionate about gender, she has engaged with other partners to engage market women in conservation efforts.



## Moses Ahimbisibwe

Moses Ahimbisibwe is BMCT's senior driver. Another pioneer of the organization who started out with its inception prides himself in knowing BMCT in and out. He has seen all the regimes of leadership at the organization and if anyone wants to know the history of BMCT, he is the right person to talk to.

Ohhh such a social person that a drive with him in Kabale town, you may mistaken him for a city mayor. He knows every person irrespective of their social status.



## Claire Kahunzire

Claire Kahunzire is the programme officer for Kisoro district. She is in charge of all the communities in the district as she monitors project implementation among the beneficiaries.

A fashion addict, Claire will make sure to have the latest accessories in town and when you want to know about trendy clothes, she is your to go person.



## Daniel Alifaki

Daniel Alifaki is the money guy. He is the Finance and Administration Manager who oversees how financial operations at BMCT run.

He is a family man and so passionate about development.



## Stephen Tumusiime

Stephen Tumusiime is the programme officer for Kanungu area. He monitors projects that include mainly Heifers, bees beneficiaries and the construction of the batwa model village.

He is a reserved person who speaks less about social events. His



## Gordon Barisigara

Gordon Barisigara is another senior driver at BMCT. Although he is a reserved person, he will make you laugh with his commentary during social discussions.



## Mark Mwiine

Mark Mwiine has been at the helm of the organization for a long time. We refer to him as papa due to his support of the staff as a father to his children.

Everyone finds it convenient to interact with him as a colleague rather than a boss because of his down to earth nature.



## *Martin Tumwekwase*

Martin Tumwekwase is the accounts assistant. Being the money man, we always talk to him nicely especially when its accountability period. He always teases us saying "I know you will soon start talking to me nicely" when we hear this statement, we just know audit is about. But he is a very strict accountant and professional. He loves jogging and is a rabbit farmer.

## *Scolah Tumwebaze*

Scolah Tumwebaze is the Batwa co-ordinator. She is a role model in her community where she was the first female graduate. She is passionate about social work and children. Very jolly, we call her BMCT baby because she is the youngest at the organisation







# Land acquisition



Batwa land and housing is yet another component that BMCT is engaged in. Even with Interventions in livelihoods, food security, education, VSLAs and advocacy for improved service delivery among the batwa, access to land was still a big challenge and it was impending a lot of efforts to implement sustainable programs for the batwa. As a result BMCT procured 406 acres of land (Kanungu (173.28 acres), Kabale/Rubanda (93.85 acres) and Kisoro (138.87 acres), resettled 303 Batwa households and provided them with start-up kits (seeds, household items and other inputs) in Rubanda, Kisoro and Kanungu Districts. This strategy is based on the belief that providing the displaced Batwa with assets is an important way to foster their sense of self-esteem.

Unlike other organizations, BMCT processes the land agreements in the names of the Mutwa for whom land has been purchased. This provides the latter with a sense of ownership and security to utilize the land productively without re-selling it. BMCT signs the purchase agreement as a witness with the local council leaders. The leaders' involvement provides support in the event of dispute between the purchaser's family and the seller.

All is not glory as on many occasions, some Batwa do not cultivate their land but rent it out to bakiga neighbours, they sell donated seeds to purchase alcohol and some have attempted to sell the land. It is also absurd that when one visits the households in this village, some will be found untidy and without beddings in the hope that everything should be provided to them by the Trust.



## *ousing for decent shelter*

Following the acquisition of land, batwa households still had no resources to construct themselves decent housing. Several batwa households around Kisoro, an extremely cold district kept losing young children to pneumonia due to indecent housing. As is the philosophy for BMCT to provide holistic support, we started the journey of housing for the batwa.

Inclusive program implementation is another key sustainability approach for BMCT thus any housing beneficiary Mutwa must participate in the construction of his/her home by either providing labor or financial contribution for the purchase of some raw materials. Shelter provided includes construction of a main house (3 bedrooms), a kitchen, a latrine and a water tank to maintain hygiene.

One of the 2019 housing beneficiaries, 59 years old George Kakongozo is exceptionally thankful and excited by BMCT's intervention, he says "After years of living in a small hut with a leaking roof which I constructed when I was still had energy. Me and my wife Jane, have been stranded after our hut collapsed in 2018 due to the heavy rains. The wife with a heavy heart remembers "See! I have no child, they all kept dying when they were young. The rain could not spare them". These they said during the handover ceremony of their new home.

Another beneficiary, Jane Kinyangamba was quoted saying "I had to look for old mats to cover myself in case it rained at night. I am now living in this beautiful house which I constructed with BMCT's help. We have planned to maintain it and keep it in good condition because it is our new home"





## *model village*

It is due to the good testimonies from the housing beneficiaries that BMCT, decided to create a BATWA MODEL VILLAGE. Initiated in 2018, the purpose of the village was to have several batwa stay in close proximity for social, economic and psychological cohesion. Each family house is 3roomed, solar- energy powered, has a pit latrine, drying rack and a water tank. The village sits on acres of land and houses families with a minimum of 5 members per household. The project has helped us consolidate program activities among the batwa and we hope that we can get partners to support us offer batwa a life worth living.

In the model village, the Batwa say they found a home like they used to be due to the fact that they live together as a community. Their Chairperson karimunda Benon says “Everyone had neglected us and we have been living a destitute life, if it wasn't for BMCT who bought for us land, we would still be slaves to the Bakiga” They currently cultivate their own lands, saving money under the VSLA methodology and thus life is improving







# Water sanitation and Health

Located in the hilly areas of southwestern Uganda, BMCT communities have a problem of water shortage. Found at the bottom of steep hills, the natural springs are the most common sources of water. Other fetch from streams, shallow wells and very few can access tap water. It is because of this problem that BMCT set out to construct gravity water schemes to their beneficiaries.

With support from Swarovski, the scheme had four reservoir tanks constructed. These cover 42 kilometres with ground laid pipes and 58 distribution taps. The tanks have benefited four parishes of Bujegwe, Karangara, Ntungamo and Rutendere in Kayonza sub-County with an estimated population of 17,000 people. Among the direct beneficiaries are: nine schools (five under Water School Project), three health units, a Sub County Head quarter and three churches. The gravity water schemes have since been handed over to the community for management.

Annually BMCT works with at least 20 schools to inculcate the idea of water conservation into the young generation. We carry out sanitation competitions among schools where a school that wins the competition is awarded with sanitation facilities that are lacking in their school.



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MCT 11

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**2**  
BWINDI







# *ourism friendly markets*



Tightening its grip in working with non-conservationists, BMCT has been at the forefront of working with other players to include markets in the conservation call. This has been achieved through the Tourists friendly Markets program which seeks to attract tourists to local markets. The project includes cleaning of selected markets every February in preparation for the Annual World Wildlife day celebrations.

Market vendors have also been advised to sell indigenous fruits and foods as a conservation move. These fruits and foods are presumed to be the attractions for visiting tourists who would like to learn about Uganda's indigenous fruits and foods, Participation in this event has so far come from companies like KCCA, Red cross, century bottling company and the Uganda national cultural centre (UNCC)



# Harnessing CSR

As a give back gesture, BMCT partners with healthcare provider IAA to offer outreach medical services to communities that contribute towards conserving the environment. The service is offered free of charge to the people that attend conservation events like World Wildlife day, World Tourism day, Wild run among others.







# *CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION*

BMCT also promotes energy saving stoves in households to reduce the amount of trees that are currently being cut for firewood and the health implications of smoke filled cooking environments. 155 household members were trained and supported with energy saving stoves. These include; Kyabuyorwa Upper, Northern Ward, Butogota T/C (62 households), Abakyara Bengozi Katoma A, Katoma Village, Kitojo Parish, Ruhija Sub-county (63 households) and Katoma Women's group, Katoma Village, Kitojo Parish, Ruhija S/c (30 households)



To protect the nature and to promote alternative conservation-friendly livelihoods in the area, BMCT distributed 36918 assorted tree seedlings to Kasenene Bakbara Tukore (4000 assorted seedlings) and Kin-yogo Ngozi Group (4418 assorted seedlings), Tahondi Micheal (11,000 eucalyptus seedlings), James Gilukwayo (10000 seedlings) and Kyumbugushu Bataka Group (5500 assorted tree seedlings) be planted at schools and private woodlots in the target areas.



# BMCT

work is however, not without trials: With projects largely financed from the profits that accrue from the initial fund from the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the fund profit has been shrinking due to the shocks surrounding the globe eg with the advent of elections in America, the Brexit, the Covid19 pandemic, all these affect its growth. This in return means that as a trust we cannot get enough money to finance projects. Recently to counteract such problems, we have started to solicit for funds from other source eg applying for proposal writing, partnerships etc.

The Believe, Batwa Girls” program is implemented among girls aged 9-18years –attending primary and secondary school and living in vulnerable contexts. Over the course of a year, the Batwa girls are accompanied by Believe Team Leaders – the “BTL” (Girl movers and LEAD Mentors) – who have followed an educational path and today are an example of a new model of life opportunities. The program works to ensure that Batwa girls stay in school safely and successfully to build a future life plan, gaining awareness of their potential to positively influence their community and the world around them.

The project involves activities like an exchange program, an annual girls boot camp, hikes, group sensitisations among other activities



With the advent of COVID19, many Batwa girls got married due to the closure of schools. It is due to this reason that BMCT under the “Believe Batwa Girls” program launched a campaign dubbed “Batwa Girls Dream”

The campaign is aimed at increasing education funding for a mutwa girl child since these girls particularly face a double-edged challenge as girls but also as batwa. Men still use these girls as a guard against HIV. It is still believed that sleeping with a mutwa can prevent one from contracting HIV because “it is said that the batwa cannot catch HIV themselves”. Most Batwa girls have been sexually harassed and even get infected innocently because of such harmful myths.

The campaign's target is to collect 25,000,000 UGX (Twenty five million shillings) for a 2 years' worth of books for 1000 batwa girls in the 3 districts of Kisoro, Kanungu and Rubanda districts by 2022. While launching the campaign, the Trust Administrator said that the heart of this campaign was “to reduce the number of early marriages among the batwa”









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**How to donate**

**Account Name: Bwindi Mgahinga  
Conservation Trust**

**Account Number: 9030005620731**

**Bank: Stanbic bank**

**Branch: Kabale**

# DATA FROM BMCT'S EDUCATION SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

Academic Year	Kabale			Kanungu			Kisoro			Grand Total		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Girls	boys	All
2008	109	97	206	108	100	208	206	191	397	388	423	811
2009	135	127	262	108	100	208	249	267	516	494	492	986
2010	89	75	164	103	92	195	153	165	318	332	345	677
2011	96	83	179	118	103	221	166	181	347	367	380	747
2012	103	86	189	107	106	213	158	182	340	374	368	742
2013	89	85	174	111	125	236	144	178	322	388	344	732
2014	72	82	154	111	121	232	154	171	325	374	337	711
2015	50	52	102	115	117	232	151	174	325	343	316	659

# THE TRUST PARTNERS



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