



**REPUBLIC OF UGANDA**

Vulnerable and Marginalized Groups Plan  
for the Batwa around Echuya Central Forest Reserve

**UNDER THE PROJECT**  
**Investing in Forests and Protected Areas for Climate Smart Development**  
**(IFPA-CD)**  
**P170466**

Prepared by the Ministry of Water and Environment

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## ACRONYMS

BDO	Batwa Development Organisation
BIDO	Batwa Indigenous Development Organisation
BIEO	Batwa Indigenous Empowerment Organisation
BINP	Bwindi Impenetrable National Park
CFR	Central Forest Reserve
CFM	Collaborative Forest Management
CRM	Collaborative Resource Management
CSO	Civil Society Organizations
DLG	District Local Government
ESF	Environmental and Social Framework
ESMF	Environmental and Social Management Framework
ESS	Environmental and Social Standard
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FPIC	Free Prior and Informed Consent
GoU	Government of Uganda
GRM	Grievance Redress Mechanism
IDA	International Development Association
IFPA-CD	Investing in Forests and Protected Areas for Climate Smart Development Project
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MGNP	Mgahinga Gorilla National Park
MTWA	Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities
MUST	Mbarara University of Science and Technology
MWE	Ministry of Water and Environment
NFA	National Forestry Authority
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NP	National Park
PA	Protected Area
PF	Process Framework
PROBICOU	Pro-biodiversity Conservationists in Uganda
SNP	Semuliki National Park
TSP	Technical Service Provider
UWA	Uganda Wildlife Authority
VG	Vulnerable Groups
VIC	Visitor Information Center
VMGF	Vulnerable and Marginalized Groups Framework
VMGP	Vulnerable and Marginalised Groups Plan
VMG	Vulnerable and Marginalized Groups
WB	World Bank
WR	Wildlife Reserve

## Introduction

The Government of Uganda (GoU) is implementing the “Investing in Forests and Protected Areas for Climate-Smart Development (IFPA-CD or Project) Project”. The project is financed by the International Development Association (IDA) of the World Bank (with financing of US\$148.2 million equivalent). The implementation of the project is led by the Ministry of Water and Environment (MWE), Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA), and the National Forestry Authority (NFA). As of August 31, 2025, the NFA has been mainstreamed into MWE. Therefore, throughout this document, all subsequent references to this entity will be noted as MWE/ex-NFA to accurately reflect this organizational change. The project was approved in April 2020, became effective in August 2021, and closes on June 30, 2026.

**The development objective of the Project is** (i) to improve sustainable management of forests and protected areas and (ii) increase benefits to communities from forests in target landscapes. The Echuya Central Forest Reserve (hereinafter Echuya), located in the Albertine Rift region, is one of the protected areas under the project.

During project preparation, the MWE, jointly with UWA and ex-NFA, prepared and disclosed the project specific [Vulnerable and Marginalized Groups Framework \(VMGF\)](#)<sup>1</sup>. The VMGF was prepared to meet the requirements of the World Bank Environmental and Social Framework (ESF) under the Environmental and Social Standard 7 (ESS7) on Indigenous Peoples / Sub-Saharan African Historically Underserved Traditional Local Communities. The purpose of the VMGF is to guide the preparation and implementation of Project interventions where there is a presence of Vulnerable and Marginalized Groups (VMGs) in the project areas.

The VMGF provides guidance to the implementing agencies on addressing the needs of **distinct, vulnerable, social and cultural groups** which possess the following characteristics, as defined by ESS7: *(i) self-identification as members of a distinct cultural group; (ii) collective attachment to geographically distinct -habitats or ancestral territories; (iii) customary cultural, economic or social institutions that are separate from those of the rest of the society; and (iv) an indigenous language, often different from the official language of the country or region.* The Batwa people is a group that meets these criteria in the IFPA-CD Project area, described in detail in section 4.2 below.

The VMGF recognizes the importance of the rights and interests of the VMGs / the Batwa and calls for their effective engagement in the design and implementation of the Project activities in four of the Project’s protected areas, namely Echuya Central Forest Reserve (CFR), Mgahinga Gorilla, Bwindi Impenetrable and Semuliki National Parks, as the Batwa live adjacent to these four Protected Areas (PA). These PAs are shown on the map below.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://ugandawildlife.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Vulnerable-and-Marginalized-Groups-Framework-VMGF-for-Uganda-IFPA-CD.pdf>

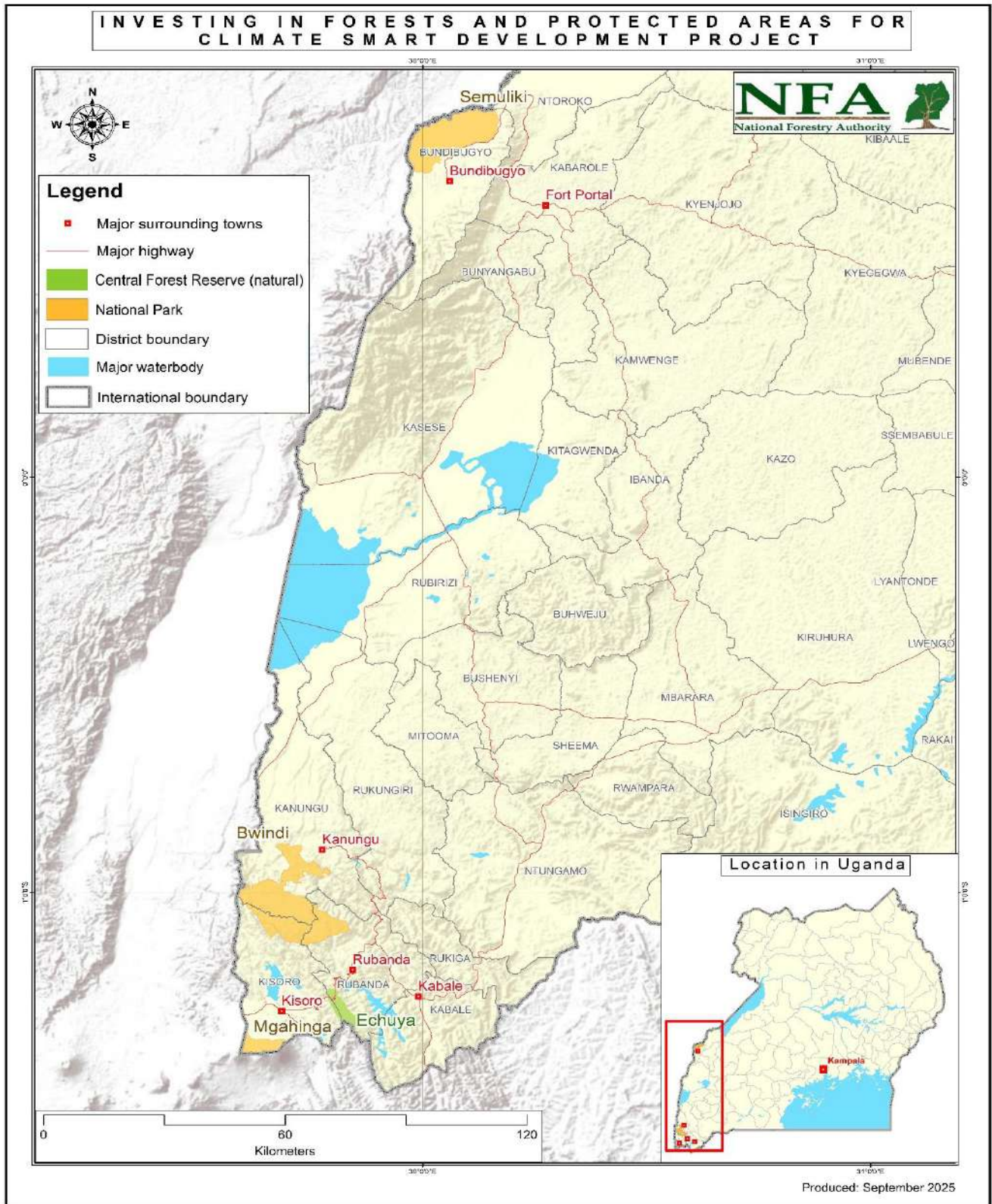


Figure 1 Map showing 4 PAs with Batwa presence

The VMGF highlights the need to develop separate VMGP for each of these project-targeted PAs with a view to ensure that Batwa communities living around them participate in and equitably benefit from the project. **This is, therefore, the specific VMGP for the Echuya CFR that has a population of about 2,200 Batwa living nearby.**

The VMGF and the four VMGPs developed under the Project draw on the use of existing participatory forest/resource management mechanisms used by UWA and ex-NFA for protected areas adjacent communities, which are set out in the Uganda Wildlife Act (2019) and the National Forestry and Tree Planting Act (2003). For the purpose of this VMGP, the relevant participatory forest management arrangement is the Collaborative Forest Management (CFM) model, which is implemented in protected areas managed by ex-NFA/MWE such as Echuya CFR.

**Collaborative Forest Management (CFM)** - This is a formal and mutually beneficial arrangement between a forest-adjacent community or forest user group and a forest management institution or a private forest owner whereby the community or forest user group and the responsible body share roles, responsibilities, rights and returns (benefits) in a forest reserve or part of it.

The CFM arrangement is based on the National Forestry and Tree Planting Act 2003 and the related Revised Guidelines for Implementing Collaborative Forest Management in Uganda (Guidelines for Implementing Collaborative Forest Management) 2023. The CFM model applies in Central Forest Reserves such as Echuya. Under the CFM arrangement, a local community group, formally registered as a Community Based Organization (CBO) by the local authorities, enters into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with MWE/ex-NFA for co-management of a specific part of the CFR. The details of the current CFM groups and agreements are set out in Annex I *CFM Groups and Agreements in Echuya CFR*.

The above protected areas' co-management arrangements are also further described in the Process Framework (PF) developed to guide Project implementation. The PF outlines participatory processes for determining appropriate use restrictions and measures to address potential adverse impacts on livelihoods that may result from such restrictions. In addition to the VMGP and the PF, the Project has developed several other instruments to manage environmental and social risks in accordance with Uganda's laws and policies, as well as the World Bank Environmental and Social Framework (ESF). Notably, the Stakeholder Engagement Plan (SEP) ensures that information is disclosed in an inclusive, timely, and culturally appropriate manner, and that project-affected and interested parties -including the Batwa people- are meaningfully engaged. The SEP outlines specific strategies for engaging the Batwa communities that were considered during both the preparation and update of this VMGP. Furthermore, the SEP describes the Project Grievance Mechanism, which is also addressed in section 11 of this document.

The SEP builds on the key principles of stakeholder engagement outlined in the Stakeholder Engagement Framework, prepared during project preparation and disclosed in 2020.

The Environmental and Social Management Framework, prepared and disclosed in January 2020 and further updated in 2024 (and being updated again in 2025) identified key project impacts, proposed mitigation measures, outlined mechanisms for the screening of proposed project activities and identified potential environmental and social impacts and their subsequent management. The Labour Management

Procedures were designed and disclosed in 2020 (and updated in 2024) to guide engagement and management of workers under the project.

## 1. Purpose and Scope of the VMGP

This VMGP sets out measures and actions agreed upon with the VMGs present in the Project areas, specifically, in this instance, the Batwa communities living around Echuya, to enable their effective participation in and benefit from the Project. The initial version of the VMGP for Echuya CFR was adopted and [disclosed in 2023](#),<sup>2</sup> based on two rounds of dedicated VMGP consultations with the Batwa communities around Echuya and NGOs and CSOs working with them, undertaken in 2021 and 2022. This document represents the updated version of the VMGP for Echuya CFR, which incorporates insights from recent consultations and lessons learnt during VMGP implementation. The measures described in this plan include specific responsibilities and timelines to ensure that its implementation can be monitored throughout the remainder of the Project, which is scheduled to close in June 2026.

## 2. Background and Rationale for the Update of the VMGP

Implementation of the VMGP was initiated in 2023. As implementation has advanced and implementation lessons started emerging, by late 2024 three Batwa CSOs communicated expectations for project support that differed from those agreed in the consultations undertaken as part of VMGP preparation. (such as supporting land rights, including a Batwa representative on the Project Steering Committee, support to various infrastructure investments for the Batwa (like a cultural museum and a training center), transferring ownership of the Batwa trails to the Batwa, giving 10 percent of the project funds to the Indigenous Peoples, and so on). In response to such feedback, an update to the VMGP was considered and initiated in 2025. This updated VMGP for Echuya CFR is informed by engagements during implementation of VMGP activities, additional engagements held in April 2025, consultations carried out in July 2025, and validations undertaken in December 2025. Each of these involved multiple meetings with Batwa communities, civil society organisations (CSO), including Batwa-led organisations, and local government representatives.

## 3. Project Background

The IFPA-CD project has four components. Table 1 below sets out those Project activities under Components 1 (subcomponents 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3.) and 2 (subcomponent 2.1.) that have been or will be implemented in Echuya. There were no activities under the other subcomponents of Components 1 and 2, or under Components 3 and 4 that were implemented in Echuya CFR and, as such, these are not relevant or included in Table 1 below. Component 4 finances project monitoring and management, including environmental and social management. Preparation and revision of this VMGP is an activity under

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<sup>2</sup> [https://nfa.go.ug/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Vulnerable\\_and\\_Marginalized\\_Groups\\_Plan\\_2023.pdf](https://nfa.go.ug/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Vulnerable_and_Marginalized_Groups_Plan_2023.pdf)

Component 4. A full description of all Project components and activities can be found in the disclosed IFPA-CD Project Appraisal Document.<sup>3</sup>

It is important to note that project financing supplements ongoing activities funded by ex-NFA and its partners in the target PAs, based on the priorities identified during project preparation. It aims to improve ecological condition and tourism infrastructure of these PAs, using co-management approaches working with the communities, within the existing legal and regulatory framework.

*Table 1. Project components and activities applicable to Echuya CFR*

Components/Subcomponents	Activities
<p><b>Component 1:</b> Investments to improve the management of forest protected areas.</p>	<p>Focus on improving the management of government-owned forest and wildlife protected areas to ensure they can continue to generate revenues and provide important environmental services. Provide support to seven National Parks, three Wildlife Reserves, and 27 Central Forest Reserves (CFRs). Implementation led by the MWE (ex NFA) and UWA.</p> <p><i>Summary of activities:</i> Improve management of high biodiversity values of forests and for generating jobs and revenues that can help sustain their conservation and increase benefits to local communities.</p>
<p><b>Sub-component 1.1:</b> Improvement of infrastructure and equipment for the management of forest protected areas</p>	<p>Activities in Echuya, implemented by MWE (ex NFA)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improvement of ex-NFA/MWE staff housing (senior ranger post) – planned</li> <li>• Investment in logistics and communication equipment (motorcycle, binoculars, GPS device, laptop and desktop) – completed</li> <li>• Installation of solar power units – planned</li> <li>• Construction of rainwater harvesting and storage facilities for staff housing – planned</li> </ul>
<p><b>Sub-component 1.2:</b> Increasing the involvement of local communities in the management of forest and wildlife areas by increasing their access and benefits from these areas.</p>	<p>Activities in Echuya, implemented by MWE (ex NFA)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthening capacity of CFM groups through livelihood support activities (e.g., Batwa targeted training on handicraft, entrepreneurship and business management and provision of inputs for craft making)</li> <li>• Community awareness activities</li> </ul>

<sup>3</sup> See <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/304401587952865863>. See also modifications introduced by Project Restructuring <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/099111925105631444>

<b>Subcomponent 1.3:</b> Restoration of degraded natural forests and habitats within Protected Areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investment in seeds for production of seedlings of indigenous species and enrichment planting</li> <li>• Bamboo liberation</li> </ul>
<b>Component 2:</b> Investments to increase revenues and jobs from forests and wildlife protected areas	Focus on increasing revenues and jobs from these forest and wildlife protected areas through targeted investments in tourism and productive forestry.
	<i>Summary of activities:</i> Increase the economic contribution of forests through boosting revenue generation and job creation and strengthen incentives for improved forest management. Investment in tourism infrastructure to achieve continued development of nature-based tourism, and in addition, investments to increase forest industry-based jobs and incomes.
<b>Subcomponent 2.1:</b> Investments in tourism	Activities in Echuya, implemented by MWE (ex NFA)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Construction of visitor information centre</li> <li>• Construction of forest ecosite gate - planned</li> <li>• Construction of board walk for swamp tourism walk - planned</li> <li>• Construction of bird hides – planned</li> <li>• Construction of a visitor information center – planned</li> <li>• Clearance and signage installation along the Batwa trail– completed</li> <li>• Ecotourism training for local tour guides – completed</li> </ul>

## 4. Relevant baseline conditions

### 4.1. Description of Echuya CFR

The Echuya Forest Reserve was constituted in 1939 and was first gazetted and declared as undemarcated crown forest of 4,144 ha in 1941. It was demarcated in 1944 and re-gazetted as a Central Forest Reserve by Legal Notice No. 41 of 1948 with an area of 3,403 Ha. Management is vested in the Ministry of Water and Environment (ex NFA) under Section 54(i) of the National Forestry and Tree Planting Act 2003, while Section 33(1) stipulates rights and privileges of communities.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Forest Management Plan for Echuya CFR 2016-2026.

20% of Echuya CFR's land is located in Bufumbira County in Kisoro District, and the remaining 80% is in Rubanda County in Rubanda District. The southern boundary runs along Rwanda's northeastern border. The CFR has an altitudinal range of 2,270 - 2,750 m asl; being located between 1°14' and 1°21'S and 29°47' and 29°52'E. Echuya is located on a high-altitude ridge that runs between Lake Bunyonyi, 5 km to the East, and Mgahinga Gorilla National Park, 13 km to the southwest, and 11 kilometers to the east of Kisoro Town. The northern end is traversed by the main Kabale to Kisoro highway<sup>5</sup>.

The Large Muchuya swamp draining north runs in the centre of Echuya. Echuya CFR represents the highest point on both sides of Kabale and Kisoro districts by the fact that from around Rwaburimbe forest station one starts ascending on either side of Kabale-Kisoro Road. The general topographical feature of the area is steep slope. The vegetation in Echuya CFR is dominated by mountain bamboo (*Arundinaria alpina*) on the northern and north-east. In fact, Echuya is a natural montane bamboo forest with increasing conversion pressure for industrial, commercial and domestic use.

Echuya CFR has a tropical climate with annual rainfall range of 1,400 -1,900mm. Annual mean temperature ranges from minimum 7-15°C and maximum 20-26°C. The forest receives two rainfall peaks; March to May and September to November with a severe dry spell during December-February and mild dry weather occurs between June and August.

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<sup>5</sup> Nature Uganda (2015), The status of biodiversity in Echuya Central Forest Reserve. Nature Uganda, Kampala, Uganda.

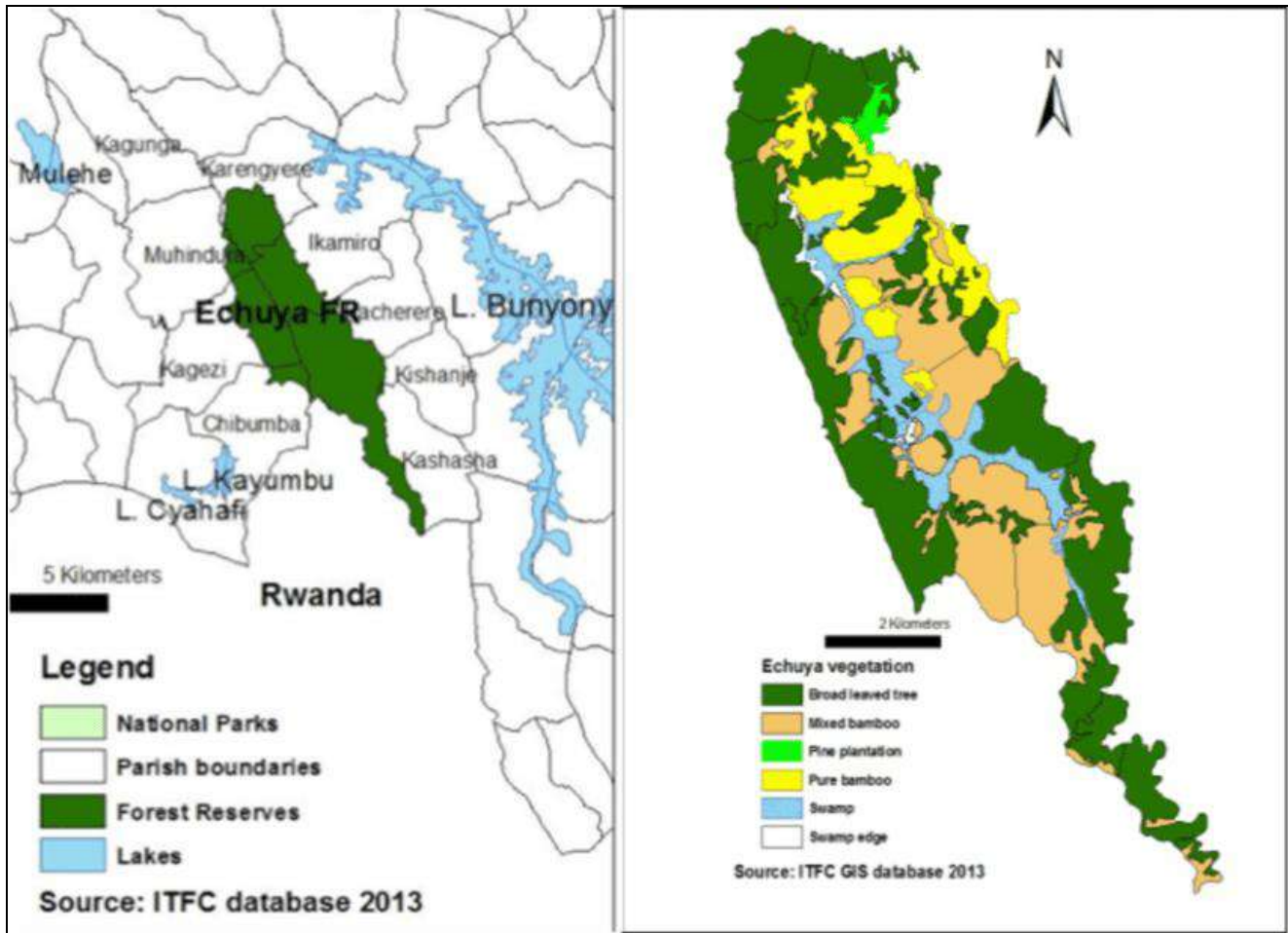


Figure 2. Map of Echuya CFR

Echuya CFR has high conservation value of bird species that are endemic, rare, or globally threatened, and is a known birding destination. It is also the only natural forest adjoining both Kabale and Kisoro districts and the sole source of supply for wood and non-wood forest products.

Echuya CFR is managed according to its Forest Management Plan; current plan is dated 2016-2026. Planned management activities in Echuya are divided into four working circles, namely (1) Production; (2) Biodiversity conservation (which includes both the Strict Nature Reserve and Buffer Zone); (3) Adjacent community livelihoods; and (4) Research. CFM arrangements take place within both the production and the adjacent community livelihood working circles, as further detailed in the Collaborative Forest Management section 4.3 below.

## 4.2. The Batwa around Echuya CFR

The Batwa are former forest dwellers who once inhabited much of the forested areas in the Great Lakes region, mainly in southwest Uganda, Rwanda, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Lewis, 2000; Beswick, 2011). The Batwa are known for their short stature, hunting skills, and traditional dancing, particularly the Rutwa dance. They used to dress in hides and skins while living in the wild and

demonstrated social cohesion. Their custom is to provide a dowry in the form of sheep, goats, and honey. Only a small number of people marry other community members. Currently, the Batwa reside near protected areas in the districts of Rubanda, Kisoro, Kanungu, and Bundibugyo.

The Batwa are indigenous people in Echuya CFR and hold strong social and cultural attachments to the forest. As of 2024, the Uganda Bureau of Statistics estimates that there are approximately 3,857 Batwa people in Uganda, comprising less than 0.01% of the country's population.

There is a total of 689 Batwa households in the Kisoro and Rubanda Districts, with a combined population of 2,753 persons (see Table 3 below). According to the most recent indigenous Batwa Population Census conducted by the Bwindi Mgahinga Conservation Trust (BMCT, 2020), 48% of these are men, and 52% are women. Kisoro has an average Batwa household size of 4.1, whereas Rubanda has a size of 3.8. Based on the study’s analysis of age distribution, the majority of Batwa people (68.4%) are under the age of 25 and a sizeable portion of them 21.3% are youngsters under the age of five. However, the population of Kisoro includes Batwa of Echuya CFR, BINP, and Mgahinga National Park.

*Table 2: Population of Batwa in Kisoro and Rubanda Districts (2020)*

District	Number of Households	Males	Females	Total
Kisoro	516	1,009	1,090	2,099
Rubanda	173	308	346	654
<b>Total</b>	<b>689</b>	<b>1,317</b>	<b>1,436</b>	<b>2,753</b>

Echuya CFR is located in the most densely populated area of Rubanda and Kisoro districts. Other than the Batwa, the forest is surrounded by the Bakiga and the Bafumira who comprise a bigger percentage of the population. Batwa’s households are scattered in various settlements in villages located adjacent to the forest. The main settlements are located in Birara and Rwamahano Batwa Communities.

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An increase in Batwa residents has been observed in the area of Echuya CFR. According to Plumptyre *et al.* (2004) and the VMGF (2020), the Batwa made up 1.6% of the population at the time, with Bakiga and Bafumbira making up the bulk. This number has been estimated by some sources to be around 5%, with Bakiga, Bafumbira, Hutu, and Tutsi accounting for a larger portion.<sup>6</sup> The Echuya CFR Batwa homes, however, are dispersed across a variety of towns near the forest.

Although there is no current specific formal census to ascertain the numbers of Batwa people living around Echuya, there are population estimates drawn from consultations conducted in 2022 which are shown in the table below.

*Table 3. Population estimates for the Batwa adjacent communities around Echuya CFR*

District	Community /Settlement	Parish	Sub county	Number of Household s	Average Household size
Rubanda	Rwamahano	Kamiro	Muko	64	5.9
	Karengyere	Karengye	Muko	31	6.5
	Murubindi	Kacerere	Bufundi	80	7.0
	Kinyarushengye	Kashasha T/C	Bufundi	38	4.3
	Nyakabungo	Kashaha	Bufundi	18	3.4
	Kishenyi	Kashasha	Bufundi	6	3.8
	Nyakerera	Kacerere	Bufundi	15	3.3
Kisoro	Biizi	Kibumba	Murora	33	5.1
	Birara	Birara	Bukimbiri	50	4.3
	Kanaaba	Muhindura	Kanaaba	39	5.0
	Gitebe	Kagyezi	Kanaaba	53	4.2
	Rugesi	Kibumba	Murora	25	6.1
<b>Total</b>				<b>452 (ca. 2,200 persons)</b>	

Source: Field Data

### **Socioeconomic organization, land issues and resource use patterns**

The Echuya forest had been severely encroached upon before it was designated as a CFR. Livelihoods of communities surrounding Echuya CFR depend on subsistence agriculture, forest products for commercial and domestic purposes and petty trade. Demand for use of forest products is very high as there is limited alternative source of natural forest products.<sup>7</sup> As of now, both Batwa and non-Batwa populations engage in some activities including wild hunting, collecting honey, mushrooms, water, poles, and making firewood and placing beehives. The Batwa place cultural value on the forest and make religious offerings to their deities there. During the Batwa consultative meeting held at the ecotourism site in Echuya CFR on 12<sup>th</sup> September 2022, it was observed that, following the displacement in 1990s, Batwa communities

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.bwindiimpentrablenationalpark.com/activities/meet-the-batwa-of-echuya-forest>.

<sup>7</sup> Echuya Forest Management Plan, 2016-2026.

have depended on the work of NGOs who coordinate and support their livelihoods, with little or inadequate consultation of and involvement from the Batwa<sup>8</sup>.

*‘Instead of stealing, we want to have land to cultivate and other means of income; in this scenario, we may increase our efforts to preserve the forest. We encroach on forests because we have a tiny amount of land and use it exclusively for agricultural. Some people even lack.’* – Male participant during the Batwa consultative meeting held at the ecotourism site in Echuya CFR on 12<sup>th</sup> September 2022.

*“The only difficulty that remains is education, but I am delighted that we have this space because we battled for it (referring to the location of the conference). We signed a contract for this location, and you are welcome to give us more land. I want to express my gratitude to all of the partners who helped the Batwa purchase land.”* – Comment from female during the Batwa consultative meeting held at the ecotourism site in Echuya CFR on 12<sup>th</sup> September 2022.

Observations from consultations with the Batwa carried out in 2022 revealed that the displacement from the forest dispossessed the Batwa of almost all their land rights. Most of the Batwa who own land have obtained it from support from NGOs, but they continue to live a life of neglect, begging for food and working as a source of cheap labor.<sup>9</sup>

As a consequence of their displacement, the Batwa have continued to be vulnerable and suffer severe isolation, discrimination, and socio-political exclusion, as also confirmed by earlier observations made by Batwa leaders during the consultations with Batwa people for developing the VMGF. During these consultations, it was noted that Batwa’s customary rights to the forest lands have not been recognized within Uganda, and they have not been compensated for the loss of their lands and the resultant lifestyle (hunter-gatherers) since their eviction from the forest.<sup>10, 11</sup>

Studies have shown that the Batwa in the area of Echuya CFR are the most landless as compared to other community members, much like in other Batwa settlements. According to the LASER-PULSE (2022) investigation, Batwa’s marginalization is mostly attributed to their lack of land access, ownership, and utilization. Existing research indicates that they do not possess enough land to produce enough food for their needs, to sell, or to build adequate housing. The Batwa are the only tribe that does not possess ancestral land, but sufficient land may be an issue for the rest of the population in the areas where they dwell.

The Batwa people, including those that historically lived in and around the Echuya forest, were never given land compensation or adequately resettled after being displaced from the forest in the 1990s, which would have been crucial in helping them rebuild their life. There is a prevalent perception that this has led to their marginalization from society and increased vulnerabilities in terms of socioeconomic status, culture, and politics, as well as a loss of identity and dignity. NGOs have largely been at the forefront of efforts to buy land for the community. According to BMCT (2020), most NGOs maintain the acquired

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<sup>8</sup> Batwa consultative meeting organized and Facilitated by the Consultant on 12/09/22 at Echuya Tourism site.

<sup>9</sup> Consultation meetings held with the Batwa near Echuya CFR on 12/09/2022.

<sup>10</sup> Consultative meeting by the consultant with Key stakeholders and Batwa NGO leaders held on 11/9/2022 at Manhattan hotel In Kabale Town

<sup>11</sup> Batwa groups are pursuing the matters related to that historical relocation in the Ugandan High Court (United Organisation for Batwa Development in Uganda and 11 Others v Attorney General and 2 Others (Constitutional Petition No 3 of 2013) 2021 UGCC 25 (19 August 2021).

land in trust as a precaution against disputes with neighbors and loss to land speculators. BMCT acquired 93.85 acres in Kabale/Rubanda, resettled the Batwa, and gave them starter kits (seeds, household items, and other inputs). The BMCT's policy is founded on the idea that giving displaced Batwa assets is a critical step in boosting their sense of self-worth, because it was only via owning productive assets like land, a home, and cattle that the Batwa people gained respect from the surrounding communities. LASER-PULSE (2022), however, notes that the purchased land is insufficient to house the full Batwa community, forcing the majority of them to live as vagrants and placing them in a more precarious condition where they must beg or rely on other ethnic groups for survival.

Since there is no evidence to support their claim to ownership, some who obtained land from NGOs (and the government) express doubt regarding their ownership of the property: *“We, the Batwa, all support the Movement Government, or NRM, as it is known. But we're all lagging behind. We don't have a place to live. Others were left behind while some received land. We have been waiting for the land that the government promised us?”* (quote from Batwa female participant during consultative meeting organized and facilitated by the VMGP preparation team on 12/09/22 at Echuya Ecotourism site).

Being landless has numerous consequences, including food and livelihood insecurity. The Batwa have become beggars and wanderers. Overcultivation has drained the small plot of land they have been farming.

## **Education**

Poor education is a defining characteristic of Batwa communities in Uganda. More than half of Batwa people do not have any kind of formal education, according to numerous studies<sup>12</sup>. There are more men than women among those who have been able to complete some form of schooling. Only 3% of the Batwa in the area of Echuya have completed at least high school. The main contributing factors to the low educational attainment among the Batwa communities include poverty, unfavorable attitudes to education, and discriminatory behavior.

For instance, it was noted during the discussions with the Batwa in Rubanda that children from other tribes, such as the Bakiga, do not want to be friends with Batwa children in school and that derogatory remarks about Batwa children are not uncommon. Other tribes' students typically do not openly exchange educational materials with the Batwa Children. According to the BMCT's Population Census (2020), out of 476 Batwa, a total of 282 (59.4%) in Kisoro and Rubanda did not have any formal education. The percentages of those with tertiary education were 0.4% in Kisoro and 0.8% in Rubanda District, respectively.

### Contributing factors to low educational attainment:

- a) Poverty:** Despite more people having access to free education under the Universal Primary Education Program and Universal Secondary Education, feedback from community consultations with the Batwa suggested that the low educational attainment of the Batwas was caused by a lack of supplies like school supplies and stationery. More crucially, they lack access to food at home

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<sup>12</sup> Mbarara University of Science and Technology (2020), The marginalization of the Batwa people of South western Uganda, as an indigenous community, Bwindi Mgahinga Conservation Trust (2016) Batwa Population Census Report.

and in their neighborhoods as well as at school. It is common for the Batwa children to escape from school when teaching is going on to go and beg for food.

- b) Negative attitudes towards education:** Additionally, it was noted that the majority of Batwa continue to show little interest in education and do not recognize its advantages. The Batwa traditional method in the forest entailed elders passing on their knowledge informally to the younger generation, orally and via practice. As a result, the Batwa are not familiar with the mainstream educational system and were not raised in it. Even though authorities and parents penalise students who disobey, the majority of kids choose to skip class and disobey.

*“Our children do not like schooling, in many instances; they have been given books and other scholastic materials by non-governmental organizations and other well-wishers. But when they leave home to go to school, they end up loitering in trading centres and resort to begging” (Female Batwa leader, during a meeting in Echuya Ecotourism Centre on 12 September 2022, Rubanda District<sup>13</sup>).*

- c) Discriminatory acts against the Batwa at school:** Reports of discriminatory actions against Batwa students have had an impact on their educational experiences. Yelling and discriminatory acts by other tribes against Batwa Children at school have made them lose interest in schooling.

## Health and wellbeing

Aside from the government-supported universal access to health care, it was noted during consultative meetings with key stakeholders working on Batwa issues that NGOs and civil society have been at the forefront of Batwa health and welfare. Batwa communities are said to have the worst health. This is also consistent with the results of several studies, like LASER-PULSE (2022) and BMCT (2020), which also revealed issues regarding the health of the Batwa people. For instance, in a study based on 654 persons, as a total population of Batwa in Rubanda District, it was reported that 36.4% of the Batwa people in Rubanda district consume alcohol and smoke cigarettes. Men consume more alcohol than women overall. In the same study, the reported HIV prevalence was 5.9%, with a prevalence of 4.5% among males and 6.9% among females. Rubanda district had an HIV rate of 6.2% on average. According to the study, 23% of the respondents did not know their HIV status. Only 38% of Batwa women use maternal health services, including prenatal care. Additionally, only half of the Batwa women deliver their babies in a medical institution, with only 33% reporting to have ever utilized family-planning technique in the past. A latrine was found to be present in only one out of every five Batwa households. In Echuya, the VMGP team’s field visit in June 2022 revealed that cooking takes place either in an open space or in people’s sleeping quarters.

At least one in every four Batwa experienced gender-based violence in just one month. This violence is frequently committed by spouses and is strongly linked to rising alcohol misuse and poverty. At least 30% of the local Batwa have reported experiencing physical abuse. The majority of Batwa women have spoken out against sexual, financial, and emotional abuse. At least one in ten participants reported that the

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<sup>13</sup> Batwa consultative meeting organized and Facilitated by the VMGP team on 12<sup>th</sup> September 2022, at Echuya ecotourism site.

COVID-19 period led to the escalation of all forms of violence. The superstition that sleeping with a female Mutwa (Mutwakwazi) can treat HIV/AIDS and back pain worsens GBV.

### **Batwa's social systems and culture**

Notwithstanding the numerous problems faced by Batwa, they continue to value their forest-based social system, culture, and traditional practices as an important part of their self-identification. The Batwa people consider themselves one group with the same history, culture and contemporary socio-economic challenges. They also consider themselves to be the best forest conservationists. The traditional practices which define their ethnic group as a forest people include hunting and gathering forest resources, eating uncooked food, worshipping gods in the forest, sleeping in caves, guiding forest researchers and tourists, dressing in leaves and animal skins, making fire using dry sticks and speaking the Orutwa language, albeit this is sadly becoming extinct in the community.

Evidence from literature<sup>14</sup> indicates that the Batwa had a distinctive culture that was mostly based on their hunter-gatherer way of life before 1991. In a study by Mbarara University of Science and Technology (MUST 2020), out of 476 Batwa reached in the study the majority (321 persons or 67.6%) revealed that they were born and raised in the forests. Of these 321, a total of 128 (40.1%) confessed deriving their ancestry from Echuya (LASER-PULSE, 2022). In the same research, more than one-third of the Batwa still claimed the forest as their place of origin. According to these investigations, some Batwa continue to visit the forests for religious and therapeutic reasons under the CFM framework between NFA and community associations.

The Batwa traditionally had locations designated for burials and send-off ceremonies related to the final funeral rites. For instance, graves were typically located close to large trees deep within the forest, and the deceased were interred upright. In the past, the Batwa worshipped, revered, sacrificed, and gave offerings of appeasement to their "deity" in certain locations, a practice that was severely hampered when they were driven out of the forest decades ago. The Batwa males were in charge of safeguarding their families and property, as was the case in most traditional patriarchal societies. Men were hunters and would gather medical herbs to give to male children. One would first hunt an animal to be respected as a man. Men were expected to be warriors and responsible for supplying fire (*gushingata*). Women worked in ceramics, gathered medicinal herbs for themselves and their children and were in charge of food production and child rearing. Men, on the other hand, were free to use their resources and money in any way they pleased.

The language of the Batwa is an important aspect of their culture. A third of the Batwa, according to MUST (2020), claimed *Orutwa* or *Rutwa* as their mother tongue and spoke it. Evidence from similar discussions with the Batwa in Karengyere showed that the majority of the Batwa are no longer able to speak *Rutwa*, because they have continuously assimilated other languages used by the local dominant communities such as Bakiga and Bafumbira. The majority of Batwa around Echuya can speak *Rukiga* and *Rufumbira*, as evidenced at the consultative meetings. The declining influence of the Batwa culture must be noted. Only a few elderly Batwa still speak the *Rutwa* language routinely.

The cultural values identified from the consultations<sup>15</sup> show that Batwa deeply value Echuya as their cultural heritage. They attach considerable cultural importance to forest resources including rivers, hills,

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<sup>14</sup> Mbarara University of Science and Technology (2020), The marginalization of the Batwa people of Southwestern Uganda, as an indigenous community.

<sup>15</sup> Consultative meeting held with the Batwa at Echuya Ecotourism site on 12th September, 2022.

plants and animals. The Batwa believe that their god, Gihanga, resides in the forest. They have designated cultural sites within the forest where they gather to worship and offer sacrifices to honor and appease Gihanga. These sacred areas contribute to forest conservation, as they are meant to remain undisturbed. However, certain ceremonies, which involve burning slaughtered animals as part of the sacrifices, pose a risk of fire outbreaks in the forest.<sup>16</sup>

Batwa access to cultural sites was previously not regulated under the Collaborative Forest Management (CFM) agreements adopted between 2006/2008, which expired around 2016/2018 and governed access and use of Echuya Central Forest Reserve (CFR) resources by adjacent communities. However, when the four expired CFM agreements with park-adjacent communities were renewed in 2023 (outside the scope of the IFPA-CD Project) they included provisions recognizing and protecting Batwa cultural sites.<sup>17</sup> Under the current CFM arrangements in Echuya, Batwa community members, and any other ethnic group with cultural sites, are free to access these areas and conduct their cultural rituals, as long as their practices do not involve destructive or unlawful activities. The CFM arrangements existing in Echuya for access and use of the CFR resources are further explained in section 4.3 below and Annex I.

To Batwa, the forests are a source of physical, emotional and spiritual well-being. Before the forests were gazetted several decades ago, Batwa communities depended on forest resources for food, medicine, basketry, firewood, marketable items, house construction, tools, rituals, hunting and recreation. Cultural songs, dances, household implements and tools, local names of people, places, water points, caves, gullies, streams, and hills within the park all reflect a long history of human involvement. Through consultations with the Batwa communities and review of literature, a number of culturally significant items were identified, alongside their importance in resource conservation. The summary of items of cultural significance is highlighted in the table below:

*Table 4. Key plant and animal items and their cultural significance for the Batwa around Echuya*

	<b>Valued item</b>	<b>Cultural significance</b>
1	Honey from stingless bees and honeybees	Important in preparing the beer used in offerings and sacrifices to appease the spirits of their ancestors
2	Animals, including bush pigs, flying squirrels, cane rats, francolins and mudfish	Meat was a staple food for Batwa and was also used in worship. Animal skins were used as clothes and storage bags. Flying squirrels were used as dowry.
3	Plants, including wild yams, mushrooms, fruits like <i>Myrianthus</i> sp. and vegetables like <i>Solanum nigrum</i>	Important food items
4	<i>Rytigynia kigeziensis</i> , <i>Piper guinensis</i> , <i>Ocotea usambarensis</i> , <i>Toddalia</i> sp. and <i>Prunus Africana</i>	Important medicinal plants
5	<i>Ficus</i> sp. and <i>Erythrina abyssinica</i>	Important in acts of worship
6	Bamboo	Building material, material for crafts, fuel wood, and a product for sale

<sup>16</sup> Review of Collaborative Management Agreements around Echuya Central Forest Reserve in Rubanda & Kisoro Districts. A participatory situation Analysis Report (2022), USAID-Ex NFA, p. 35.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

In addition, to promote tourism and share their traditional way of life, the Batwa community in Echuya has established a Batwa cultural trail, where they showcase their rich cultural traditions to visitors.

The Echuya Forest Management Plan explicitly provides that “Management shall prioritize the socio-economic and cultural rights of the indigenous Batwa in collaboration with other Partners (Prescription 41).” These rights have also been confirmed through the consultation meetings held by the VMGP team with the Batwa and key stakeholders in June 2021 and September 2022 around Echuya CFR and are highlighted in section 6 below:

*Table 5. Cultural values of the Batwa and their importance in the management of Echuya CFR*

	<b>Cultural values</b>	<b>Importance in Echuya CFR management</b>
1	Beliefs/Indigenous-local knowledge about medicinal herbs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sustainable use of forest resources</li> <li>• Use of traditional knowledge in forestry conservation initiatives</li> <li>• Respect for forest resources in terms of human health improvement</li> </ul>
2	Spiritual beliefs and practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Valuing forest, thus motivation for protection</li> <li>• Contribution to cultural tourism</li> </ul>
3	Tourism trails/Batwa forest trail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diversified tourism products</li> <li>• Gainful engagement of the Batwa as tour guides, porters etc.</li> <li>• Promoting and preserving the Batwa culture and way of life as a tourism product</li> </ul>
4	Batwa Music Dance and Drama	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conservation Communication strategy and awareness raising</li> <li>• Empowering the Batwa community through generation of income</li> <li>• Contribution to community tourism around Echuya</li> </ul>

According to the Echuya Forest Management Plan, Batwa resettlement programs with the Mgahinga and Bwindi Impenetrable Forest Conservation Trust and the United Organisation for Batwa Development in Uganda projects have been transforming Batwa culture and social setup by integrating their livelihoods with neighboring communities of Bakiga and Bafumbira in Kabale and Kisoro districts.

### **Batwa cultural trail in Echuya**

The Batwa people have informally established and maintained a tourism trail in Echuya CFR, which they operate in collaboration with ex-NFA. As part of the support to this Batwa trail, ex-NFA entered into an agreement with the Echuya Ecotourism Association (ECOTA), which is a CFM umbrella organization working on ecotourism in Echuya. These initiatives were established prior to the IFPA-CD Project. However, the IFPA-CD Project has supported a local guides group, which includes Batwa members, in response to their request for support to rehabilitate the existing trail. This activity has involved trail clearance and signage installation and provided employment for 15 people, including 10 Batwa. See also table 1 above on project activities and section 5 below on status of VMGP implementation prior to its revision.

## **4.3. Collaborative forest management and community benefit sharing**

### **Collaborative Forest Management (CFM)**

In addition to the current Forest Management Plan, collaborative forest management arrangements are governed by the National Forestry and Tree Planting Act (2003) and the Revised Guidelines for Implementing Collaborative Forest management in Uganda (2023). The National Forestry and Tree Planting Act (2003), sections 13 and 14 provide for the management of forest resources in a sustainable manner consistent with the purpose for which it was created and highlight prohibited activities within the forest reserves. Section 15 further calls for collaborative forest management where a responsible body may enter into a collaborative management arrangement with a forest user group to manage a central or local forest reserve or part of it per applicable regulations or guidelines.

The CFM model is implemented through a community association formally registered as Community Based Organization (CBO) adjacent to the reserve that enters into CFM agreements (Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs)) with the ex-NFA for co-management of part of the CFR. The agreements establish the rights and obligations of each party and tie community resource access to specific management zones defined in the Forest Management Plan. They also specify which user community is covered as well as the defined resource use/access area for that community. Permitted resource access/use under CFMs include firewood, medicinal plants, craft material and access to cultural sites, among others. The agreements also define roles and responsibilities, benefit-sharing, monitoring, and compliance mechanisms; and are accompanied by a CFM plan that specifies the CFR areas subject to co-management and the activities covered by it. Ex-NFA/MWE oversees resource extraction, while CFM groups participate in monitoring activities on the ground, contribute to reduced illegal use, issue permits for resource use; sensitize the community and collaborate with ex-NFA/MWE and district local governments.

The CFM groups, as registered CBOs, determine their own governance structures. They have a governance body elected by the resource users themselves, namely an Executive Committee of approximately 9 members. This elected committee represents the community association in negotiating, implementing, and monitoring resource-use agreements.

The CFM arrangements are expected to generate (monetary and non-monetary) benefits which meet the varying expectations of each CFM group. Based on a review of site-level experiences by Kazoora *et al.*, (2020) some of the benefits/positive impacts of CFM to date include enhanced natural forest conservation, increased tree cover, and decreased pressure on CFRs, with some groups and individuals beginning to practice activities adopted in CFM on their own (private) land, e.g., seedling growing and distribution and trees growing, such as the bamboo now being grown by the Bufundi Echuya Forest Conservation and Livelihood Improvement Association (BECLA).

As a result of its demand driven approach, the CFM arrangements have been opened to all segments of society adjacent to CFRs, including the Batwa communities around Echuya CFR, to access resources and to participate in social economic development.

The CFM processes around Echuya were among the first sets of CFM agreements in Uganda. As such, their implementation was a learning process by many actors. The implementation of CFM arrangements has allowed improving the relations between ex-NFA/MWE and the local communities compared to the situation before. CFM agreements have created a sense of ownership of the forest among the local community which has driven their interest to continue participating in its protection. The CFM program implemented by ex-NFA/MWE has developed and strengthened community institutions and provided benefits to the resource users. However, many Batwa feel they have been marginalized by the Bakiga (the dominant ethnic group) in the existing CFM arrangements. Due to high population pressure, there is

inadequate availability of these resources outside the forest, and this has increased the demand and pressure on forest resources, to which the Batwa people have a special attachment. This also highlights the importance of regulated access through collaborative forest management and the need to enhance Batwa participation in CFM arrangements.

### **Arrangements for resource access and use in Echuya**

In line with the Echuya Forest Management Plan, permitted access and use of forest resources under CFM agreements take place mainly in community-oriented working circles (i.e., the Community Livelihoods Working Circle), while excluding strict protection areas.

In Echuya CFR, there are currently four CFM agreements (these were signed by ex-NFA without Project support in 2023). These agreements were negotiated after the previous agreements expired between 2016-2018; in total, they include 1,188 members (previous agreements covered 1,103 members) and provide co-management rights over 680 ha of the CFR (around 20% of the CFR). These groups include 101 Batwa. Typically, the CFM groups have an annual membership fee, but as part of the re-negotiation of agreements with ex-NFA, it was proposed by ex-NFA that the Batwa members could be exempted. This suggestion was accepted by the CFM groups<sup>18</sup> and this has helped increase Batwa participation. Each of these CFM groups has at least one Batwa representative on its CBO Executive Committee. Further details on the existing CFM agreements with community associations around Echuya CFR are provided in Annex I.

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Typically, the CFM groups have an annual membership fee, but as part of the re-negotiation of agreements with ex-NFA, it was proposed by ex-NFA that the Batwa members could be exempted, which has helped increase Batwa participation. In addition, each of these CFM groups has at least one Batwa representative on its CBO Executive Committee. There has therefore been an increase in Batwa participation in CFM decision-making and in Batwa membership within these groups. However, there are opportunities for improvement. Monitoring by MWE/ex-NFA shows that although the overall Batwa membership has grown, the number of Batwa members who are actively participating in the CFMs is rather low.<sup>19</sup> To address this issue, the updated VMGP includes actions that focus on raising awareness and strengthening both Batwa participation and the capacity of Batwa representatives on the CFM Executive Committees, as seen in section 7 below.

The resources accessed under the CFM agreements currently in place include firewood collection, ropes (craft material), herbal medicine, access to and harvesting of stingless bees (which is considered as a high value medicine by the Batwa).<sup>20</sup> These CFM agreements additionally contain provisions to promote ecotourism development. According to the CFM plans that complement the agreements, the ex-

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<sup>18</sup> As evidenced during consultations in December 2025.

<sup>19</sup> According to a NFA report from September 2025, membership increased from less than 60 CFM members in 2019 to 101 Batwa members in 2025. However, only 39 Batwa members across the 4 CFMs were found to be active members.

<sup>20</sup> Bamboo harvesting is not allowed under the CFM agreements in Echuya, since it is extinct in most parts of the forest. Local communities are instead encouraged to domesticate bamboo in their private land.

NFA/MWE supports the local communities in mapping and zoning the CFM area into the various management zones to suit the activities under each CFM. The operation area of the CFM plan usually extends beyond the forestry boundary to include the forest adjacent parishes where livelihood improvement and other environment related activities are implemented.

The CFM agreements in Echuya include provisions that specifically target the Batwa people. For example, they specify that it is the responsibility of ex-NFA/MWE “to ensure that the cultural rights and forest-based livelihoods for Batwa provided for under the agreement are realized and respected”. Additionally, while non-Batwa community members are permitted to collect firewood and ropes once a week, the Batwa members are allowed to collect these resources for 3 days a week. Batwa cultural leaders should ensure that use of fire during access to cultural sites and ritual practices is confined to the site in question and does not spread to other parts of the forest. Both Batwa and non-Batwa members are allowed to extract herbal medicine any time, as long as they do not indulge in any other illegal activity in the forest. Furthermore, the CFM agreements allow Batwa members to access honey from stingless bees in buffer and production areas of Echuya CFR. However, since the harvesting process involves digging holes in the ground, the Batwa members must ensure that they cover the hole after harvesting.

As part of preparing the renegotiation and renewal of the Echuya CFM agreements currently in force, ex-NFA/MWE conducted, with USAID support, a participatory situation analysis in September 2022. This analysis included a series of consultations at the district and community level, including a specific consultative meeting with the Batwa communities. One of the findings of the situational analysis was that the continued discrimination and exclusion of the Batwa in CFM arrangements prompted ex-NFA to suggest the development of a separate CFM agreement for Batwa around Echuya CFR, which was subject to consultation of stakeholders in order to get collective support for the proposal.<sup>21</sup> However, all the stakeholders including the Batwa themselves opposed the idea of having a separate agreement for the Batwa people, for the following reasons:

- A separate agreement would cause the Batwa to be more discriminated against by the Bakiga and the Bafumbira;
- Batwa people access the same forest area as other tribes, thus a separate CFM agreement for them would cause resource use conflicts between them and other tribes (Bakiga and Bafumbira);
- As such, a Batwa-only agreement would undermine the ongoing process of Batwa’s social and economic development and integration with other tribes.
- Unified CFM agreement, on the other hand, would help improve relations between the Batwa communities and other ethnic groups; build confidence and self-esteem for the Batwa people; promote sharing and co-existence as well as knowledge and skills transfer among the community groups.

The issue of a Batwa-exclusive CFM agreement resurfaced during the 2025 consultations for VMGP revision and validation of the agreed actions under the updated VMGP. As seen in section 7 below, there

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<sup>21</sup> The stakeholders consulted on this proposal included: UWA staff of Mgahinga and Bwindi national parks, political leaders and technical staff of Rubanda and Kisoro district local governments, and NGOs (Nature Uganda, United Batwa Development Organization) and the Batwa community themselves; as recorded in the Review of Collaborative Management Agreements around Echuya Central Forest Reserve in Rubanda & Kisoro Districts. A participatory situation Analysis Report (2022), USAID-Ex NFA, p. 14.

has been an understanding that a Batwa-only CFM is not feasible or necessary, and that Batwa members could create Batwa subgroups for specific activities that are of their interest.<sup>22</sup>

The IFPA-CD Project has not supported the renegotiation or renewal of the previously existing four CFM agreements in Echuya, which concluded prior to the start of the Project. However, the Project has supported sensitization of the CFM groups aimed at strengthening their governance structures and at incorporating more Batwa members; as well as providing livelihood support for Batwa communities, as further detailed below.

## 5. Status of VMGP implementation (pre-revision of 2025)

The IFA-CD Project has provided training support to the Echuya CFM groups on governance aspects, including gender, social equity (roles, responsibilities and rights), financial management and marketable art and handicraft. It has also provided the CFM groups with startup items like industrial tailoring machines, waiving table looms, portable looms, threads, yarn, raffia, sack cloth, etc., for making crafts, as seen in table 7 below.

As part of the VMGP revision process that concluded in 2025, MWE/ex-NFA compiled and discussed with stakeholders a consolidated view of VMGP implementation to date. The table below summarizes progress against planned outputs as well as actions and outcomes achieved. It reflects what had been completed or was in progress prior to the VMGP update for Echuya and served as the evidence base presented to stakeholders during consultations in July 2025.

*Table 6. Status of VMGP implementation in Echuya as of early July 2025*

Output and Targets <sup>23</sup>	Interventions
Conduct sensitization sessions for the CFM groups aimed at strengthening their governance structures and at incorporating more Batwa members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 30 Batwa people from the Muko and Kanaba subcounties were trained in the development of Marketable Art and Handicrafts. The CFM groups were provided with start items like industrial tailoring machine, weaving table looms, portable looms, threads, yarn, raffia, sack cloth, sisal etc for making crafts.</li> <li>• Ex-NFA supported the training of the Batwa and other CFM group members for the four CFM groups in Echuya CFR in bee keeping and value chain. A total of 65 people were trained out of which 42 were Batwa.</li> <li>• Ex-NFA has promoted the waiver of participation fees for Batwa community members joining CFM groups in Echuya. For example, in the MECA CFM group, membership fees for Batwa have been significantly reduced -from one hundred thousand Uganda shillings to just one thousand shillings- making it more accessible for Batwa people to join.</li> </ul>

<sup>22</sup> Meeting with members of the Muko Echuya Conservation Association (MECA) CFM on December 11, 2025.

<sup>23</sup> As per the original VMGP.

Support the further development and maintenance of Batwa community trail around Echuya CFR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ex-NFA supported and facilitated the Batwa people to maintain their trail of 20 km by slashing the trail connectivity to other major trails from the Batwa trail in Echuya CFR.</li> <li>• The Batwa are part of the CFM groups that undertake trail maintenance in Echuya. Routine maintenance of the trail was done in Echuya CFR. 25.3 km</li> <li>• The activity involved trail clearance and signage installation and provided employment for 15 people, including 10 Batwa.</li> </ul>
Conduct training for Batwa tour guides	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training of 4 Batwa tour guides has been completed. This was a “training of trainers” as the four can extend the skills to others. There were 40 trainees in 4 tourism CFRs including other community members.</li> </ul>

## 6. Development and Consultation Process of the VMGP

The development of the VGMP followed the earlier adoption of a VMGF, which was prepared in consultation with target communities previously engaged during Uganda's REDD+ Program. During the VMGF consultations, Batwa communities as well as CSOs and NGOs (both Batwa-led and non-Batwa led) identified several key issues, including:

- The need to ensure Batwa communities and their leaders are fully included in planning, selection, design, and implementation of IFPA-CD activities.
- Strengthening collaborative resource management with UWA and investing in Batwa groups through training in crafts, beekeeping, and confidence-building.
- Ensuring coordinated, culturally sensitive interventions that support Batwa traditions while meeting conservation and development goals.
- Integrating Batwa cultural values into Protected Area management and linking this to education and employment rooted in indigenous knowledge.
- Promoting gender-balanced job opportunities such as guides, porters, and boundary management.

After completion and adoption of the VMGF in 2020, the preparation of the VMGP specifically for Batwa communities around Echuya began in 2021. Community consultations were held in 2021 and 2022 (with significant delays as a result of restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic), with the VGMP for Echuya adopted and disclosed in March 2023. The VMGP documented the feedback received from the Batwa living adjacent to Echuya CFR and the specific actions that had been identified and agreed with them for inclusion under the IFPA-CD Project, as well as measures for avoiding, minimizing or mitigating for potential negative social economic impacts on them, if any. This includes appropriate ways of engaging Batwa communities to benefit from the project, in line with ESS7. The measures are described in this plan, which also specifies the responsibilities and timelines to ensure that implementation can be monitored throughout the project lifetime. The VMGP is aligned with strategies and actions prioritized in the current Echuya CFR Forest Management Plan, which seeks to recognize the socio-economic and cultural rights of the indigenous Batwa in collaboration with other partners.

The VMGP has been developed and revised through inclusive participation of Batwa communities adjacent to Echuya and relevant local stakeholders, including District Local Government representatives,

as well as NGOs and CSOs that are led by Batwa or work on Batwa issues and/or Echuya conservation. Each new consultation carried out built on the earlier efforts, beginning with feedback on the project's progress and previous outcomes. Key VMGF and VMGP aspects have been revisited, and participants reminded of earlier discussions.

The main phases of consultation that have informed the VMGP for Echuya CFR, along with their respective methodologies, are summarized below. Annex III provides a summary table of all stakeholders consulted for the development and revision of the Echuya VMGP.

## 6.1. Phase I of Consultations (June 2021)

Initial consultations with Batwa leaders were held in 2021 during Uganda's COVID-19 lockdown, following strict SOPs. Methods included Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), small Focus Group Discussions (FDG) (no more than five people), and limited virtual or telephone interviews. Discussions were conducted in Rukiga and Rufumbira, familiar to both the Batwa communities around Echuya CFR and the team preparing the VMGP. There was also a deliberate effort to ensure that the FDGs were organized in open spaces to avoid gathering and crowding.

A total of 15 participants, mostly Batwa leaders, attended the focus group meetings and the KIIs. As a result, a draft VMGP was prepared. However, participation was limited due to COVID-19 restrictions and the unsuitability of remote methods, as few Batwa people had phones. As a result, most consultations involved only selected Batwa members, and the ability of participants to fully express themselves was constrained.

There was therefore a need for more consultations in order to reach a broader range of stakeholders, including NGOs working on Batwa issues, and more Batwa community members within the project area, and generate more site-specific baseline information.

## 6.2. Phase II of Consultations (September 2022)

After COVID 19 restrictions were lifted, a second round of dedicated consultations was held on 12<sup>th</sup> September 2022 at the Echuya CFR Ecotourism site and Manhattan Hotel in Kabale respectively, with park adjacent Batwa communities, NGOs, CSOs and relevant authorities. In total, 90 people were engaged in this round of consultations, including CFR adjacent Batwa communities, NGOs/CSOs and relevant authorities. The meetings aimed to gather stakeholders' concerns and preferences on IFPA-CD project design and implementation to ensure Batwas' participation and equitable access to Project benefits. The VMGP consultation was developed in line with Chapter Six of the Vulnerable and Marginalized Groups Framework (VMGF) and the SEP for the IFPA-CD Project. These consultations also served to validate the draft VMGP prepared based on phase I of consultations.

**Consultations with Batwa communities and/or Batwa representative groups around Echuya.** 65 people (30 men and 35 women) from Batwa communities around Echuya CFR participated in a consultation meeting held on September 12, 2022, at the Echuya CFR tourism site. During these meetings, participants were guided to prioritize activities and to rank project issues through an issue-identification exercise based on previous reports.<sup>24</sup> These consultations clarified project objectives, investments and

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<sup>24</sup> Specific area issues, needs and aspirations were already presented in specific Protected Area Reports and Annexed to the project VMGF document.

implementation arrangements and were conducted in vernacular (Rutwa, Rukiga and Rufumbira) to enable meaningful participation of the Batwa members. Prior communication was made by telephone through NGO representatives to share objectives, venue, and expected outcomes. Physical meetings followed a set agenda. Through the consultation process, participants identified several challenges and proposals related to participation in and benefit from Echuya management.

**Some of the key challenges and needs identified** by Batwa community members at the September 2022 consultations included:

- **Land and benefit-sharing challenges.** Participants identified land scarcity as the most significant problem for the Batwa in Echuya CFR and calls were made for greater efforts to identify opportunities for acquiring additional land for the Batwa. Some suggested developing income-generating activities within the forest with the aim of using the proceeds to purchase more land. Some Batwa members also noted challenges in ensuring fair distribution of benefits, with women and youth often receiving less than men from development activities.
- **Participation in decision-making and capacity building needs.** Participants noted that since the CFM agreements were established when Batwa communities were not educated on these initiatives, they ended up being underrepresented in CFMs membership and leadership structures. In their view, there was an urgent need to sensitise the Batwa on CFM and involve them. Some participants also observed the very limited involvement of Batwa people in government development programmes and project committees at both national and local levels. Batwa community members further expressed the need for greater support and encouragement to participate in enterprise development initiatives that align with forest conservation, acknowledging their role as the first conservationists. They highlighted the need to promote income-generating activities that are forest-friendly and can be incorporated into CFM agreements.

**Batwa communities also provided their feedback on the activities that could be included under IFPA-CD.** As recorded in the original VMGP for Echuya CFR, their proposals included:

- Train the Batwa on techniques for growing some indigenous trees.
- Increase the participation of Batwa in CFMs (leadership, decision making, planning) and provide them livelihood support
- In order to effectively implement the MoUs between ex-NFA and community associations, carry out awareness program for communities on resource use, especially on the terms and conditions of the MoUs.
- Support Batwa to lobby government to initiate projects with activities that can be done in a forest to generate money so that we can use this money to buy land. These activities could also be provided for in the CFM agreements.
- Help the Batwa community get space where they can collect items of cultural importance and preserve and display them for tourism.
- To address the potential risks of fire resulting from the traditional honey harvesting methods, support and train communities in honey harvesting techniques and acquire modern honey harvesting tools and gears.
- Adopt a participatory approach while developing CFM agreements and undertaking monitoring and evaluation of resource offtake.

- Support the Batwa forest trail.
- Train the Batwa people in forestry management and conservation approaches.
- Develop further tourism products based on the Batwa culture. This would not only help in diversifying the existing tourism package in Echuya CFR but would also benefit the Batwa by improving their income when they guide tourists to their cultural sites, sell handicrafts and dance for tourists.
- Recruit qualified Batwa to work as ex-NFA officers, tour guides, and porters in Echuya CFR.
- Support seed supply for food crops other than only sorghum to be planted as cash crops and consumed by the tourism industry. Some of the Batwa people who own a few tiny plots of land should be encouraged to produce fast-growing crops like vegetables that are greatly desired by the tourism industry.
- Build marketing expertise among the Batwa people by for example supporting them in creating and maintaining marketing tools like a website
- Encourage apiaries and collaboration with ex-NFA to allow Batwa people to keep bees near the forest boundaries, and in some areas of the forest. Additionally, they may move wild bees from Echuya to inhabit the beehives along the forest border.

**Consultations with CSOs and authorities.** A consultation meeting was held on 12th September 2022 at Manhattan Hotel in Kabale. This was attended by 25 participants including key project partners and stakeholders such as local ex-NFA staff, Rubanda and Kisoro District Local Government representatives (Chief Administrative Officer, District Tourism and Natural Resources Officers), NGOs, community groups supporting Batwa communities around Echuya.

Participants were purposively selected for their experience with Batwa and conservation work. The following CSOs/NGOs were engaged in this consultation:

- Batwa Development Organization
- Nature Uganda
- Bwindi Mgahinga Conservation Trust
- Nkuringo Cultural Center

The feedback received from these stakeholders at this meeting focused on the following areas:

- **Batwa’s livelihood needs and preference.** Stakeholders highlighted the need to consider current needs and preferred livelihood options for the Batwa around Echuya that could be supported.
- **Learning from previous interventions.** Stakeholders discussed some previous experiences with interventions and conservation projects targeting the Batwa community to determine what approaches have been effective and which have not.
- **Institutional strengthening and inclusive stakeholder involvement.** Participants provided inputs for strengthening the capacity of local authorities, especially the district Local Governments of Kisoro and Rubanda, and relevant government departments, particularly in their ability to address the needs of vulnerable groups like the Batwa people. They also noted the importance of involving community organizations and clearly define the responsibilities of key stakeholders involved in implementing the VMGP for Batwa around Echuya.

It should be noted that certain challenges and proposals from Batwa communities and CSOs were identified as falling outside the scope of the IFPA-CD Project. For example, those dealing with the purchase of land; the 1990s historical relocation of Batwa communities from Echuya and the recruitment of Batwa people as ex-NFA staff or porters, among others, could not be addressed within the Project's activities. This was also communicated to stakeholders during the 2022 consultations. Nevertheless, these concerns are documented here to ensure that the perspectives of Batwa communities and CSOs are fully and accurately represented in this document.

**Agreed actions for VMGP implementation under the IFPA-CD Project.** Based on the consultative meetings held in 2022, specific activities were identified and agreed to be included in this VMGP and supported under IFPA-CD project. These activities include:

- Conduct sensitization sessions for the CFM groups aimed at strengthening their governance structures and at incorporating more Batwa members
- Conduct research to document the Indigenous Batwa Knowledge and resources
- Support the maintenance of Batwa community trail around Echuya CFR through clearing and signage
- Conduct training for Batwa tour guides

In addition, the following activities were identified and supported during VMGP implementation, based on the feedback received from the Batwa communities:

- Implement livelihood support activities such as training and provision of inputs

Recognizing that the VMGP and other management plans are not intended to be static documents, but must instead be responsive to evolving conditions, a further comprehensive consultation process was undertaken, described below, with the aim of ensuring that the VMGP for Echuya CFR remains relevant and adaptive, reflecting both the lessons learnt from ongoing implementation as well as the needs and priorities of the Batwa communities and other stakeholders.

### 6.3. Phase III: Consultation process for VMGP revision (July and December 2025)

#### **Background: concerns on VGMP implementation from Batwa representative organisations**

In October 2024, during the period of implementation of the VMGP, three Batwa representative organisations - Batwa Development Organisation (BDO), Batwa Indigenous Development Organisation (BIDO) and Batwa Indigenous Empowerment Organisation (BIEO) - expressed concerns that some of their proposals were not fully captured in the original VMGP and therefore, alleged that they were not getting some of the anticipated benefits from the project implementation.

In order to address the concerns of these three CSOs and, where possible, further enhance the meaningful engagement of Batwa communities with the IFPA-CD project, a team from the MWE, ex-NFA and UWA conducted a third-phase of VMGP consultations to engage Batwa communities and relevant NGOs/CSOs and government stakeholders to review the VMGP to include additional issues and/or proposals which

were not considered in the original VMGP, also incorporating the lessons learnt from VMGP implementation to date.

### **Consultation structure and methodology**

Consultations to inform the revision of the Echuya VMGP took place in July 2025. In April 2025, under leadership of MWE, an initial meeting was held with the aforementioned 3 Batwa organisations (BDO, BIDO and BIEO) as well as other organisations working with Batwa communities around Echuya, namely the United Organization for Batwa Development in Uganda, Nkuringo Community Development Foundation, and BioVision Africa to start discussion on the VMGP revision.

The formal consultation process for updating the Echuya VMGP took place on 9, 10 and 14 July 2025. Consultation meetings were held with Batwa communities, Batwa-led organisations and key partners and stakeholders supporting Batwa communities in Echuya, including ex-NFA/MWE field staff, representatives from the District Local Governments of Rubanda and Kisoro, NGOs, and community groups that represent and assist Batwa communities around Echuya. In total, over 217 Batwa community members and 11 CSOs/NGOs were engaged for the revision of the Echuya VMGP.<sup>25</sup> The CSOs/NGOs that participated in this process are the following:

- Batwa Development Organization
- Batwa Indigenous Development Organization
- Kisoro Concern for Marginalized People
- United Organization for Batwa Development in Uganda
- Bwindi Mgahinga Conservation Trust
- Kisoro District Community-Based Development Organization
- Nkuringo Community Development Foundation
- Kisoro District NGO Forum
- Kisoro Batwa Community Initiative
- LOCAL KID NGO
- Rushaga Batwa Cultural Resource

Consultations were conducted with advance notice of more than three weeks, and information was provided to the identified stakeholders and Batwa communities in accessible languages and formats. Meetings were held in the local language (Rutwa) with translators from among the stakeholders. The consultation meetings started with providing a brief feedback on the status of the project implementation, status of implementation of the original VMGP and outcomes of the previous consultation process. The key aspects of the VMGP were highlighted and the participants were reminded of the key proposals discussed during the development of the VMGP in 2022. Therefore, the process of updating the VMGP built on the information gathered during the design and implementation of the original VGMP and supplemented with the outcomes of the new rounds of comprehensive consultations held in July 2025.

To ensure effective participation from stakeholders, consultations were open to all relevant stakeholders and at the start of the meeting they were encouraged to freely express their views and opinions, since the

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<sup>25</sup> Partner engagements in Kisoro district covered Bwindi, Echuya, and Mgahinga.

review of the VGMP means to capture reality on the ground. Systematic documentation of the process and feedback received then informed the update of the VGMP, with a focus on increasing engagement and relevance of the VGMPs to Batwa communities, having regard to the Project objective, scope and remaining implementation period. Accordingly, the stakeholders consulted were reminded of the importance of agreeing on actions that are feasible, can be feasibly implemented through the project and could be effectively implemented before the Project's closure date (June 2026). For example, issues of land acquisition, the existing government tourism revenue sharing scheme, and the existing Batwa tourism products cannot be feasibly supported through the project due to the project duration and the limited nature of project activities (as described in the legal agreement for the project).

### **Consultation outputs**

During the revision of the VMGP for Echuya, stakeholders provided valuable feedback on several key areas: the current needs of Batwa communities living around Echuya, lessons learnt from ongoing VMGP implementation - including both successes and challenges- and proposals for improving the updated VMGP.

**Batwa community members:** Batwa participants acknowledged positive steps such as waived CFM membership fees, representation on CFM groups, and access to medicinal plants. However, they requested longer, more frequent trainings, direct involvement in honey harvesting, and land for product sales. Priorities included expanded training in handicrafts, agricultural input support, and small livestock provision. Batwa groups also raised concerns about inequitable sharing of trail revenue, lack of land, insufficient access to weaving materials, and limited group organization for sales. Calls were made for Batwa ownership of the trail as well as further training in crafts and traditional dance. Trainings in agriculture and crafts were acknowledged, but follow-up support and inputs were found lacking. Some stakeholders also referred to the issue of land infertility, lack of manure and limited agricultural uptake. Key requests included further craft and dance training, livestock, marketing skills, and locally managed groups as well as addressing basic needs such as water and housing. Community savings groups were active. Some conflicts with ex-NFA were reported in Kacereere. The need for co-management, employment, and delivery of materials was stressed.<sup>26</sup>

**CSO/NGOs representatives (working with Batwa in Kisoro District) and local district staff:** Many CSOs reported limited awareness of the IFPA-CD project and called for broader partnerships, especially in herbal medicine promotion and Batwa culture. Stakeholders also expressed the need for more inclusive and adequately resourced training, tool provision, and coordination forums. Some CSO/NGO representatives also called for formation of a Batwa-only CFM.

**Ex-NFA staff.** Ex-NFA/MWE reported recent achievements including enrichment planting of 80 hectares of degraded forest, distribution of 303 beehives to four CFM groups, and training in briquette making. Maintenance of forest trails, including the Batwa trail, was noted, with further plans for a Visitor Information Centre (VIC), Batwa-focused bee value chain training, and additional community awareness activities. Low tourism in Echuya was highlighted as an area needing attention.

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<sup>26</sup> This summary feedback corresponds to the consultation meetings held with Kalenjeni Batwa Community Meeting – 9 July 2025, Echuya Batwa Camp; Rwamahano Batwa Community Meeting – 9 July 2025, Rwaburindi Primary School; Abadasigana Batwa Group – 10 July 2025, Birara; and Kashasha and Kacereere Batwa Communities – 14 July 2025.

**Lessons learnt from implementation on the VGMP in Echuya:** During the engagements with the Batwa community, NGOs/CSOs and district stakeholders, it was generally acknowledged by community members and implementing officers that the implementation of the project, although still ongoing, has resulted in a number of both positive impacts and limitations.

➤ **Identified positive impacts include:**

- Waived CFM fees have helped improved participation of the Batwa community members in CFM groups
- Provided hands on training and inputs have been helpful to develop skills of the Batwa community members and increase their livelihood earning potential
- Beehives provided have helped assure access to honey resources outside of the forest.

➤ **Identified limitations include:**

- Trainings were undertaken in enterprise development, but the community members lack continued follow-up support on the new skills and the ongoing provision of more inputs.<sup>27</sup>

The revision of the VMGP for Echuya involved a comprehensive consultation process that encompassed both the stakeholder engagements conducted in July 2025 and a subsequent, iterative validation phase. This final validation was carried out in December 2025, to review and confirm the proposed actions under this updated VMGP. Further details about this validation process are provided in Section 7 below.

## 7. Agreed Actions for the Revised VMGP and Validation

### **Validation of revised VMGPs**

During the participatory meetings, proposed actions by the Batwa during the VMGP review meeting held in July 2025 were presented to the participants for their confirmation. The participants generally agreed with the proposed actions although they were also able to propose additional actions that were not raised during the July 2025 review meetings.

**Validation of the proposed actions under this revised VMGP** was conducted through a final, iterative consultation process, involving the same stakeholders who participated in the July 2025 consultations. The invitations to participate stated the objectives and meeting schedule and were sent in advance to the District Governments of Kisoro and Rubanda for distribution via Community Development Officers, who are familiar with local stakeholders and are therefore well positioned to facilitate broad participation. Direct invitations were also sent to all CSO /NGO partners previously engaged. A few days after the invitations were sent, a summary of the VMGP, including the targets and proposed activities for the next six months of Project implementation, was also distributed to enable informed and meaningful stakeholder engagement. The consultation process prioritized oral presentations due to limited literacy among community participants. Discussions were conducted in Rutwa which is the local languages spoken by Batwa communities around Echuya. The process and outcome were duly documented.

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<sup>27</sup> Provision of additional inputs has now been planned through the project.

Validation meetings were organised in coordination with Batwa communities and community leadership, ensuring participation from elders, women and youth. Meetings were scheduled in culturally appropriate settings and time, with prior notice of at least two weeks, and were jointly facilitated by representatives of both MWE and UWA. They presented the VMGP revision process and the proposed actions for implementation under the updated VMGP; responded to questions, invited feedback and explained why certain activities suggested during the July 2025 consultations could not be included in the list of agreed actions for the next six months of VMGP implementation.

In fact, some of the issues raised by stakeholders during the consultations for VMGP revision fell outside the scope and capacity of the Project, such as requests related to land purchase, existing revenue sharing arrangements, ownership of the Batwa trail support, provision of housing and establishment of a Batwa-only resource access/use CFM.<sup>28</sup> Facilitators clearly explained these limitations to stakeholders emphasizing that while all feedback and proposals were welcome, some could not be accommodated into the revised VMGP due to Project scope.

The validation of the revised VMGP for Echuya CFR was held on 11 and 12 December 2025. The meetings included community members from the Batwa settlements of Birara, Karengyere (Kalenjeni), Murubindi, Nyakabungo, and Rwamahano in Kisoro and Rubanda districts, engaging a total of 222 community members (83 male and 139 female). These meetings, facilitated by MWE staff aimed to align VMGP interventions with community priorities and document feedback for implementation planning. Representatives of 10 local Batwa focused CSOs from Kisoro as well as the District Labour officer who represented the District Community Development Officer, the District Tourism Officer and the representative from UWA took an active part in the validation exercise.

Representatives of two local CSOs – BDO and Civil Society Coalition on Indigenous Peoples in Uganda (CSCIP-U) took an active part in the validation exercise and supported mobilization of some communities, supported interpretation during some of the community engagements, and provided clarification to community members during the engagements.

Endorsement during community validation meetings was reached through signing by the chosen community representatives. Once the community reached a consensus on the proposed actions, the Batwa community members who participated in the validation session elected three representatives per community from among themselves (a total of 15 representatives). These chosen representatives endorsed the list of agreed actions on behalf of the community, either by co-signing or by providing their fingerprint as confirmation.

Drawing on the feedback from stakeholders consulted during the VMGP update for Echuya CFR and taking into account the Project's objectives, scope and timeframe as well as applicable regulatory and practical constraints, the following targets and actions focused on Batwa communities have been agreed for implementation until the present Project closing date in June 2026.

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<sup>28</sup> In addition to other factors, there is a practical constraint to the proposed Batwa-only CFM MoU: all CFR areas available for collaborative use and access by adjacent communities have already been allocated under the existing four CFM agreements. As a result, it is not physically possible to designate an additional area exclusively for Batwa access and use around Echuya. This limitation was clearly communicated to stakeholders during the 2025 consultations and the validation of the revised VMGP.

Table 7. Proposed actions for implementation in Echuya (under updated VMGP)

Target	Implementable Interventions	Estimated Cost (UGX)	Time Frame	Resp Person
Target 1: Expanded CFM access for Batwa as members and strengthened participation in CFM executive committees	Strengthen Batwa representation in CFM executive committees and thematic subgroups' management committees: a. Create awareness among the Batwa community members on benefits of joining a CFM group.	20,000,000	April to May 2026	Service Provider to be procured
Target 2: capacity of CFM executive committees strengthened through improved coordination	Strengthen the existing CFM coordination platform that brings together all CFM leadership in Echuya CFR: a. Conduct leadership, governance and financial skills training for the CFM group executives committees	80,000,000	April to May 2026	Service Provider to be procured
	b. support the preparation of the strategic plan for each of the CFMs in Echuya	10,000,000		Internally by MWE
	c. Support CFM executive committees to establish a digital coordination platform (e.g. WhatsApp group) that brings together all CFM leadership in Echuya CFR	Deskwork		
Target 3: support Batwa communities in recording traditional Batwa knowledge for their use	a. Support the Batwa communities to collect data on the Batwa cultural activities, family life, food, marriage, traditional songs, dance and totem as well as historical aspects/ events of the Batwa existence in Echuya CFR	125,000,000	April to June 2026	Internally by MWE: Service providers with experience in implementing similar activities and based on their locations to be engaged
	b. Support the Batwa communities to undertake inventory of crafts and musical instruments and prepare visual records for tourist education			
Target 4: improved knowledge on tourism opportunities for the Batwa community members	a. Support exchange visits for the tour guides of Echuya to (i) Budongo and Kalinzu CFRs and (ii) Bwindi (Nkuringo community, Buniga Forest) b. Provide space for Batwa in the VIC to display their products to tourists	70,000,000	April 2026	Internally by MWE
Target 5: improved livelihoods opportunities for the Batwa	a. New Trainings and support with inputs and or startup requirements (20 Trainees)	270,000,000	May to June 2026	Service Provider to be procured
	b. carpentry			

community members	c. hair-dressing / barbering				
	d. Sustainable Agriculture (Irish potato, sweet potatoes growing, peas, beans, maize, cabbage, bee hives and making traditional bee hives) and provide support with inputs for planting seeds for Irish potatoes, cabbage, peas, sorghum and farm tools like hoes (65 households)				
	e. weaving				
	f. knitting				
	g. tailoring				
	h. baking				
	i. Motorcycle repair				
	j. Craft making				
	Refresher Training: (30 active members in CFM for crafts and 65 for bee value chain)				157,500,000
	a. Tour guiding, hospitality and customer care				
	b. Marketing				
	c. Tailoring				
	d. Salon				
	Provide livestock support: (65 households)				130,000,000
a. sheep					
b. poultry					
c. Goats					
d. Cows					
e. Rabbits					
Target 6: improved access to medicinal plants for Batwa community members	Establishment of medicinal plants demonstration plot on land inside Echuya CFR	12,000,000	March to April 2026	Internally by MWE-Field Personnel in Echuya	
Target 7: Improved access to water	5 tanks (Murubindi - Kacherere)	20,000,000	Before June 2026	Service provider to be procured	
	1-10,000 liter tank for Mukicuba (Karengyere)				
	1-10,000 liter tank for Kagano				

## 8. Applicability of Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC)

The IFPA-CD project team has consulted with the Batwa communities during the project design with dedicated sessions specific to the Batwa, for example during the preparation of ESMF and preparation of VMGF as well as during project implementation. The preparation of VMGP has been entirely dedicated to Batwa people, and their full engagement has been secured during this process. Informed consultations through culturally appropriate methods with Batwa communities have been carried out, leading to broad

community support of the project; identification of aspirations and agreed actions to address priority needs within the scope and objectives of the project and lessons learnt for adaptive management. The project has thereby applied the standard of meaningful consultations tailored to the Batwa people living around Echuya CFR.

FPIC, however, is deemed not to apply to the Project, including in Echuya. Under ESS7, FPIC is required for specific circumstances that have a negative impact on Indigenous peoples/VMGs, namely when the Project will:

- (a) Have adverse impacts on land and natural resources subject to their traditional ownership or under customary use or occupation;*
- (b) Cause their relocation from land and natural resources subject to traditional ownership or under customary use or occupation;*
- (c) Have significant impacts on their cultural heritage that is material to their identity and/or cultural, ceremonial, or spiritual aspects of their lives; and*
- (d) Use their cultural heritage for commercial purposes*

In this case, project activities have not entailed (and were not expected to entail) relocation of Batwa communities, nor have they caused adverse impacts on the lands and resources traditionally used by them or any significant impacts on cultural heritage material to their identity, cultural, ceremonial, or spiritual practices as provided for ESS7. As noted earlier in this document, Echuya was gazetted and the Batwa communities living therein were relocated long before the Project began and, hence, the Batwa also completely lost access to such lands and resources several decades ago (around the 1990s) prior to the IFPA-CD Project. Project activities have neither altered the boundaries of the protected area nor have supported any physical demarcation of boundaries in the areas where Batwa people are present.

Adjacent communities continue to physically access forest resources under CFM arrangements. In Echuya, specifically, many non-timber forest resources covered by CFMs can be accessed by adjacent communities, based on need, and for those resources with regularized extraction (e.g., firewood and rope), Batwa communities have preferential treatment, as noted in section 4 above. Thus, the project has not made the terms of access for Batwa or other local park adjacent communities more restrictive than what was previously regulated or agreed upon through CFM frameworks, which the Project seeks to support. Rather, in this regard, it has further promoted Batwa's capacity to benefit from and participate in existing CFMs. These regulated arrangements are based on national law and were already in place prior to the project's start and continue to allow Batwa communities regularized access to and benefit from resources within the protected areas, including through Project livelihood support activities (as further detailed in this VMGP).

In addition, while the Project also provides some limited support to enhanced CFR management capacity, mainly through provision of few equipment and technical assistance, this was not expected to result (and has not resulted) in losses of livelihoods or increased restrictions to access park resources that could cause material harm to Batwa communities' subsistence or cultural heritage, as they continue to access them under CFM arrangements and on an hoc basis, as it was case since the 1990s.

The Project does not support any activities involving the commercial development of Batwa communities' cultural heritage or traditional knowledge. It has also not imposed any restrictions on access to their cultural heritage, which continues to be safeguarded under existing CFM arrangements and CFR

management plan. Importantly, the so called “Batwa trail” in Echuya was established prior to this Project and the IFPA-CD Project has only supported the local guides group (which includes Batwa members) in response to their request for support to rehabilitate this trail -which they operate in collaboration with ex-NFA- through clearance and signage installation.

## 9. Implementation Arrangements

The implementation arrangements for the VMGP are aligned with the IFPA-CD implementation framework and collaborating institutions for implementation participate through a competitive process where needed. The main government bodies with responsibilities in VMGP implementation are MWE/ex-NFA and the local government of Kisoro and Rubanda. MWE/ex-NFA is tasked with procurement, contract management, direct implementation for some activities, and reporting on the activities agreed in this VMGP. The local governments of Kisoro and Rubanda districts, as part of its general government mandate, participate in ground monitoring and follow up on livelihood activities. The Ministry of Water and Environment (MWE) in collaboration with Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities (MTWA) provides the overall strategic direction, supervision and overall monitoring of implementation of the plan in sync with the overall IFPA-CD project. Implementation of all agreed activities will continue to be guided by the Echuya Forest Management Plan, this VMGP, and the approved Project work plans.

The District Local Governments of Kisoro and Rubanda, including the Sub-counties and parishes that make up the Local Council System, play a role in local community engagement, so the Project has put in place some actions for strengthening their capacity. In May 2025 the project supported orientation training of all project District stakeholders on inclusion and non-discrimination with emphasis of involvement of all project stakeholders in decision-making, participation and access to benefits. The project grievance mechanism also uses the mainstream LC system, and it has supported establishment and training of the Grievance Redress Committee for Echuya, the District committees and the subcounty committees bordering the park in 2023 and 2025.<sup>29</sup>

It should be noted that the VMGP has a broad range of stakeholders and partners. Stakeholders’ participation in management of wildlife resources should be enhanced through shared roles and responsibilities and ensure equitable distribution and sharing of conservation benefits and/or costs. Wildlife conservation has diverse issues, diversity of stakeholders, and, therefore, needs to increase stakeholders’ participation to enhance benefits from conservation. Protected areas are a source of various benefits to local people who need guidance to sustainably access these resources and manage any arising conflicts. In addition to government agencies, there are a number of non-governmental partners with relevant expertise that can be drawn upon. These partners are important for regular engagement under the project.

There are several CSOs and NGOs working with or led by the Batwa around Echuya, as seen in the table below.

*Table 8. CSOs and NGOs working with and led by the Batwa around Echuya*

No	Organization	Key work areas
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<sup>29</sup> Training of the Local Council 1 Chairpersons is expected to be completed in early 2026 (see also section 10 below on Grievance Redress Mechanism).

1.	Batwa Development Organization (BDO)	community development, human rights, health, education, environmental governance, tourism
2.	Batwa Indigenous Development Organization	community development, human rights, health, education, environmental governance, tourism
3.	Bwindi Mgahinga Conservation Trust (BMCT)	community development, human rights, health, education, environmental governance, tourism
4.	Civil Society Coalition on Indigenous People in Uganda (CSCIP-U)	rights of indigenous people, natural resources conservation, cultural heritage, forestry management
5.	Echuya Eco-Tourism Association (ECOTA)	tourism, collaborative forest management, community development and livelihood improvement
6.	Pro-biodiversity Conservationists in Uganda (PROBICOU)	research, natural resources governance, biodiversity conservation, forestry management, tourism, rights of indigenous people, among others.
7.	Nature Uganda	Community development, tourism, biodiversity conservation (including research), livelihoods support
8.	United Organization for Batwa Development in Uganda (UOBDU)	community development, human rights, health, education, environmental governance, tourism
9.	Bufundi Echuya Forest Conservation and Livelihoods Improvement Association (BECLA)	community development, health, education, environmental governance, tourism, CFM
10.	Kanaba Community Development and Echuya Forest Conservation Association (KADECA).	community development, human rights, health, education, environmental governance, tourism, CFM
11.	Muko Echuya Forest Conservation Development Association (MECDA)	livelihood improvement, community development, human rights, health, education, environmental governance, tourism, CFM
12.	Murora Echuya Forest Conservation and Poverty Alleviation Association (MEFCPAA).	community development, human rights, health, education, environmental governance, tourism, CFM

During the implementation of activities outlined in this revised VMGP for Echuya CFR, deliberate efforts were and will continue to be employed to include the Batwa-led institutions or institutions working with Batwa communities in implementation of specific activities especially those targeting Batwa communities, provided that this is possible within the limits of requirements of the World Bank Procurement Framework. The latter has to be complied with by any contractor or implementing partners operating with funding from the IFPA-CD Project.

Specific terms of reference will be issued for specific activities and requests made. The requests shall be evaluated by the technical teams from UWA before a decision is made. Key considerations will include:

- a. Experience of the applicant working with the Batwa and other vulnerable groups
- b. Membership and group structures (*if any*)
- c. Description of the modalities and direct Batwa engagement in the implementation and/management of benefits from the business activity.

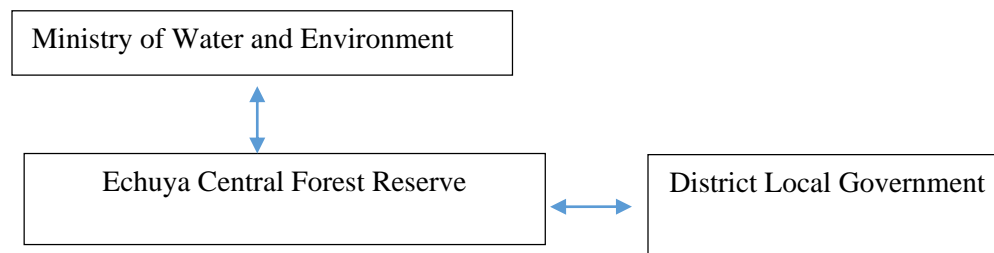
The applicants for support to Batwa groups will include all supporting documents, in line with the call for proposals and terms of reference.

Table 9. Stakeholders' roles and responsibilities

Key stakeholder	Role in the Implementation of the VMGP
<b>Government agencies</b>	
Ministry of Water and Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide strategic direction and monitor overall implementation of VMGP</li> <li>• Overall supervision of the preparation and implementation of VMG Plan for SNP</li> <li>• Participate in the district level meetings in Kisoro and Rubanda districts</li> <li>• Coordinate with other Government Line Departments and agencies such as Ministry of Tourism for ensuring effective delivery of mitigation measures</li> <li>• Make budgetary provisions for implementation of project activities</li> <li>• Provide technical support for implementation of the actions in the VMGP</li> </ul>
MWE/ex-NFA (Forest Supervisor in Echuya CFR)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementation of mitigation measures and VMGP activities as per project components 1 and 2.</li> <li>• Supervision of plans and reporting to MWE</li> </ul>
District Local Governments (Rubanda and Kisoro)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supporting communities in preparation of project activities</li> <li>• Participating in monitoring activities</li> <li>• Instrumental in supporting mobilisation of communities, formation of CFMs, following up implementation of plans, including livelihoods and income-generating activities, on the ground provision of technical guidance, and dispute settlement.</li> </ul>
<b>Non-governmental partners that could be involved in implementation of VMGP activities</b>	
Pro-biodiversity conservationists in Uganda (PROBICOU)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mobilise Batwa through Batwa Organizations, carry out training on VMG issues and conservation, strengthen the Batwa Forest Trail, work with Batwa in restoration and planting of indigenous trees in pocket forests, Livelihood, advocacy and revenue sharing management, support Batwa livelihood programs.</li> </ul>
Nature Uganda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research, conservation projects, livelihoods, ecotourism support.</li> </ul>
Bwindi Mgahinga Conservation Trust (BMCT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support Batwa access to land to facilitate livelihood demonstration projects, health, education, resettlement programs, and community development.</li> </ul>
Mbarara University of Science and Technology (MUST)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research on medical herbs, cultural sites and piloting medicinal gardens.</li> </ul>
Batwa Development Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mobilisation of the Batwa people, training and capacity building, knowledge sharing, and support of livelihood activities.</li> </ul>
Echuya Ecotourism Association (ECOTA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organize and mobilise the Batwa to participate in the project and related training programs, strengthen the capacity of the Batwa people, extend training and maintain the Batwa trail.</li> </ul>
Other organizations such as: Bufundi Echuya Forest Conservation and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborative forest management, livelihood improvement, community development, human rights, health, education, environmental governance,</li> </ul>

Livelihoods Improvement Association (BECLA), Kanaba Community Development and Echuya Forest Conservation Association (KADECA), Muko Echuya Forest Conservation Development Association (MECDA), Murora Echuya	tourism, forest conservation and restoration, sustainable forest-based activities such as apiary.
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Figure 3. Coordination and implementation Structure



## 10. Monitoring and Evaluation

The monitoring of this revised VMGP shall continue being part of the overall M&E Framework for the IFPA-CD project. The MWE has the overall responsibility for coordinating M&E and ensuring that data and information are produced on time and of the necessary quality, including reporting on Project performance and results. Monitoring data will be collected at field and agency level by MWE/ex-NFA staff and forwarded to MWE and the Project Coordinating Unit (PCU) for consolidated reporting. Implementing Agencies will host and participate in any field monitoring visits.

Alongside the M&E Framework, project reporting formats and feedback mechanisms have been developed for use by MWE/ex-NFA, DLGs and the TSPs. MWE/ex-NFA field staff has received training on stakeholder engagement and reporting templates. Available feedback mechanisms also include the GRCs and suggestions boxes installed around Echuya CFR.

In the case of the implementing agent for the Batwa or the TSP, the reporting formats will be appended to the Service Contracts. This revised VMGP already highlights key targets and indicators in section 7 above that shall inform the design of data collection tools for effective monitoring of this VMGP.

Monitoring will be the main mechanism through which the implementers of this revised VMGP will get feedback and alerts on any delays and problems. The monitoring framework will help the implementers

to measure the pace of implementation of activities. It enables timely responses while providing lessons on implementation strategies. It will also help to ascertain whether the IFPA-CD project activities are aligned with this revised VMGP, the World Bank ESF and national policy and legal procedures that provide for participation of the VMGs (Batwa).

The Project will support the engagement of community Batwa leaders during monitoring visits conducted by UWA/MWE to oversee implementation of the activities agreed in this revised VMGP.

The monitoring activities will result in regular feedback on the implementation of the VMGP, which is shared with MWE for learning and improvement of implementation modalities. The scope of Monitoring Indicators shall include the following:

- Collaborative forest management
- Livelihoods activities support
- Awareness
- Employment in project funded activities

## 11. Administrative Reporting and Grievance Redress Mechanisms

The standard record of activities undertaken in each reporting period, along with financial information, will continue to be provided until the Project closes in June 2026. For this revised VMGP, quarterly and annual project progress reports will include a section that details, for instance, the number and type of local meetings held, the number and types of grievances registered and their resolution, and the nature of measures implemented. This will benefit from routine collection of data from activity reports.

The Project Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM) in and around CFRs, including Echuya, is structured with four levels of Grievance Redress Committees (GRCs), in addition to national level GRC: at the Range/Conservation Area, District, Subcounty, and Village levels (existing Local Council LC1). In the case of Echuya, the project has established and trained the Grievance Redress Committee for Echuya range area, the Kisoro and District Committee and the Subcounty Committees bordering the CFR including Kacherere, Bufindi, Kashasha Town Council and Muko (Rubanda district), Kanaba, murora and bukimbiri (Kisoro district) in 2023 and 2025. Trainings for village leaders (Local Council 1 Chairpersons) in communities bordering the protected areas are ongoing. In May 2025 orientation training was provided to all project District stakeholders on inclusion and non-discrimination with emphasis on involvement of all project stakeholders in decision-making, participation and access to benefits. The GRCs have also been equipped with essential tools, including complaint registers, complaints logs, and reporting templates, which are actively being used.

The composition of the GRCs takes into consideration the diverse stakeholder interest groups in the project areas, including the Batwa communities adjacent to the targeted protected areas, as well as the local dispute management models and the involvement of local leaders. For example, the LC1 level GRC is comprised of the Local Council one (LC1) committee members elected by the village members. The GRC

training targets only the Chairperson LC1s with the hope that he/she will pass on the acquired skills to the rest of the committee members. The Subcounty level GRC includes Subcounty officials and NGO/CBO representatives. A wide range of channels have been put in place to facilitate access and use of the Project GRM, particularly by Batwa communities and vulnerable groups (e.g., youth and women). These include toll free phone lines, WhatsApp lines and email for submission of project related grievances directly to the MWE or UWA. In addition, suggestion boxes have been distributed by UWA to communities bordering the PAs to allow them to drop in their grievances, including anonymous written complaints. In Echuya, 14 suggestions boxes have been installed in strategic locations within villages surrounding the PA and at the field office of MWE/ex-NFA. MWE/ex-NFA field personnel are responsible for collecting the grievances from the boxes on a weekly basis and register them in the PA logbook to ensure that they are properly addressed and recorded.

Information on these channels is disseminated through posters widely circulated to local leaders and communities in the project districts. The posters have been printed in English and translated and printed in the different languages spoken in the project areas, including the local language spoken by Batwa people around Echuya (Runyakore-Rukiiga).

Within the GRCs, two people (male and female) with reasonable experience and exposure in managing GBV issues are assigned the task of handling GBV, SEA, SH, and VAC complaints issues with the confidentiality it demands. Their main responsibility is referring cases to the relevant government offices, such as the community development office, probation and social welfare office, psycho-social service providers, the police department for child and family affairs, and nearby health facilities for emergency care, contraceptives, and post-exposure prophylaxis to reduce the risk of HIV infection. The GBV committee is also charged with providing psychological support and legal advice for survivors and supporting reintegration into the workforce and community at large. These complaints are treated with strict sensitivity and confidentiality.

In addition, the Project also has an incident report mechanism for documenting and managing serious events reportable to IDA and other types of incidents that still need to be duly recorded and handled, including those that may occur inside or nearby CFRs, including Echuya. This incident report mechanism is further described in the Project's Environmental and Social Management Framework.

Further details on the project GRM structure and channels for submitting concerns and grievances can be found in the Project's SEP.

## 12. Budget and Financing Arrangements for the VMGP

According to the project implementation manual for IFPA-CD project, section 3 (the project description), sub-component 1.2 is about increasing the involvement of local communities in the management of forest and wildlife by increasing their access and benefits from these areas. The activities proposed in this VMGP are financed and will continue being financed under this subcomponent.

This subcomponent supports technical assistance packages and training aimed at developing skills at the community level to actively participate in and benefit from the management of wildlife resources. This

would include enhancing the adaptive capacity of forest dependent communities for climate resilience by strengthening their coping strategies, diversifying forest management-related employment opportunities and livelihoods, and adaptive planning and management. This comprises technical assistance packages with targeted support for women to empower them to participate and take leadership roles in natural resources management. At the field level, support will be provided for community engagement in the management of resources within Echuya CFR. This includes strengthening Batwa participation in CFM groups' Executive Committees and supporting livelihood activities within existing groups.

The budgeting arrangements for implementation of the VMGP follow those of the overall budgeting arrangements of the IFPA-CD project, in accordance with GoU budgeting procedures and fiscal year (July-June). MWE/ex-NFA in partnership with mandated officials from the DLG of Kisoro and Rubanda has facilitated the development of a work plan with timeline and budget for specific activities targeting the Batwa in line with this revised VMGP (see section 7 above). This plan has been integrated in the overall annual project work plans and budgets prepared by MWE/ex-NFA and approved by the Project Steering Committee and IDA.

Once funds have been received by MWE/ex-NFA, funds for implementation of VMGP activities will be spent in accordance with approved work plans. MWE/ex-NFA will work with the TSP competitively selected to execute activities as per agreed terms. TSPs shall report to MWE, and the financial reports shall be integrated into general Annual Reports of MWE.

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## Annex I. CFM Groups and Agreements in Echuya CFR

N°	CFM group and agreement (date, status & project support)	Batwa membership	Batwas on Executive Committee
1	Murora Echuya Forest Conservation and Poverty Alleviation Association (MEFCPAA), November 2023, in force (negotiated and signed without project support)	15	1
2	Bufundi Echuya Forest Conservation and Livelihood Improvement Association (BECLA), November 2023, in force (negotiated and signed without project support)	60	2
3	Kanaba Community Development and Echuya Forest Conservation Association (KADECA), November 2023, in force (negotiated and signed without project support)	18	6
4	Muko Echuya Forest Conservation and Development Association (MECDA), November 2023, in force (negotiated and signed without project support)	8	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>4 active resource access/use CFM agreements</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>11</b>

In addition to the above, ECOTA (Echuya Ecotourism Association) is a CFM umbrella group coordinating all the CFM groups and implementing ecotourism in Echuya. It has a MoU with MWE/ex-NFA and two Batwa representatives are on its Executive Committee.

## Annex II. Summary of feedback received during the VMGP revision in July 2025

Stakeholder Groups Engaged	Key issues and suggestions raised during various consultations with Batwa communities around Echuya in July 2025  (activities undertaken, areas for improvement and priority actions)
<p>9 July – Echuya Batwa Camp</p> <p>Kalenjeni Batwa community (29)</p>	<p><u>Training/livelihood support received</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training in tailoring; crafts, beekeeping</li> <li>• 5 tour guides</li> <li>• CFM representation</li> <li>• access to medicinal plants</li> </ul> <p><u>Limitations/areas for improvement</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training sessions were brief</li> <li>• Would like access to honey harvest</li> <li>• Need land for products</li> <li>• Would like separate CFM</li> </ul> <p><u>Priorities/Proposals</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More craft training</li> <li>• Land for selling</li> <li>• Seeds (potato/beans)</li> <li>• Sheep for manure</li> </ul>
<p>9 July 2025 – Echuya CFR</p> <p>Ex-NFA staff</p>	<p><u>Activities undertaken</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enrichment planting 80ha</li> <li>• 303 beehives to CFM groups</li> <li>• briquette training</li> <li>• trail maintenance</li> </ul> <p><u>Areas for improvement</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of MoU with the Batwa</li> <li>• Low tourism</li> <li>• Need for Visitor Information Centre (VIC) space</li> <li>• Further document indigenous knowledge</li> </ul> <p><u>Priorities/proposals</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop MoU with Batwa</li> <li>• Promote tourism</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrate Batwa in VIC</li> </ul>
<p>9 July – Rwamahano (Rwaburindi)</p> <p>Rwamahano Batwa community (30)</p>	<p>Trained in weaving; few Batwa in CFM</p> <p><u>Areas for improvement/limitations</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trail revenue excludes Batwa</li> <li>• Need selling land and greater forest access</li> <li>• Not informed of honey harvest</li> <li>• Unorganised weaving groups</li> <li>• Would like their own trail and CFM</li> </ul> <p><u>Priority/proposals</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rutwa dance training</li> <li>• More craft training</li> </ul>
<p>10 July – Kisoro District</p> <p>District + CSOs (27)</p> <p>* Consultations on Echuya, Bwindi and Mgahinga</p>	<p><u>Areas for improvement</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Several CSOs unaware of project</li> <li>• Need district partnerships</li> <li>• Need more craft tools</li> <li>• Training need to be scaled up</li> <li>• Need coordination forum</li> <li>• Would like an ecolodge</li> <li>• Improve revenue sharing for Batwa</li> </ul> <p><u>Priorities/proposals</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expand trainings</li> <li>• Coordination forum</li> </ul>
<p>10 July – Bukimbiri</p> <p>Abadasigana Batwa community (37)</p>	<p><u>Training/livelihood support received:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training in terracing</li> <li>• Invasive species removal</li> <li>• Soap making, vegetable growing; bag making</li> </ul> <p><u>Limitations/areas for improvement</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor land fertility; need manure</li> <li>• Beekeeping limited by land</li> <li>• Need financial training</li> <li>• Need seeds</li> <li>• Tailoring and weaving machines</li> <li>• Youth salons</li> <li>• Sheep died</li> <li>• Marketing issues</li> <li>• Would prefer their own CFM</li> </ul> <p><u>Proposals</u></p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More craft training and inputs</li> <li>• Rutwa dance training</li> <li>• Livestock</li> <li>• Marketing skills</li> </ul>
<p>14 July 2025 Kashasha Community</p> <p>•24 Batwa Community members</p> <p>•District Community Development Office, MWE, WB</p>	<p><u>Crafts and Livelihoods</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Previously trained by ICM in making bags.</li> <li>• Community members have craft skills but lack materials.</li> <li>• Need for more training as skills are not regularly practiced.</li> <li>• Market is not the main issue—production and inputs are.</li> </ul> <p><u>Forest Use and Traditional Practices</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Forest resources used: honey, ropes, medicines, firewood, greens, grass.</li> <li>• Community makes and places beehives in Echuya Forest.</li> </ul> <p><u>Organisational Structures and Access</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community has a group savings system.</li> <li>• Reported unrestricted access to the forest.</li> <li>• Existing local organisations: AICM, WADU, DIG OBUDU (NGOs/CBOs).</li> <li>• Community has internal leaders who are available for consultation.</li> </ul> <p><u>Priority needs and suggestions:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community members have craft skills but lack materials.</li> <li>• Need for more training as skills are not regularly practiced.</li> <li>• Discussion included interest in acquiring tailoring machines.</li> <li>• Need land to grow Irish potatoes and seeds for other crops.</li> <li>• Interest in revolving funds for sheep and pig rearing.</li> <li>• Youth possess carpentry skills; request for tools for timber processing.</li> <li>• Additional interests: poultry and rabbits.</li> </ul>
<p>14 July 2025 Kachereere Community</p> <p>~40 Batwa Community members</p> <p>• District Community Development Office, MWE, WB</p>	<p><u>Forest and ex-NFA support</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Community was trained on forest and medicinal plant protection.</li> </ul> <p><u>Bee keeping and challenges</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Beehives are destroyed by grazing animals; insufficient protection from NFA.</li> <li>•Some people intentionally destroy hives to allow animals to graze undisturbed.</li> <li>•Interest in Tornado technology for bee keeping.</li> </ul> <p><u>Relationship with NFA</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Lack of meetings between community and NFA.</li> <li>•NFA does not allow discussions on disputes.</li> <li>•Some perceive that the community has not been fully recognized as forest stakeholders and that ex-NFA support has been limited or inadequate.</li> <li>•Some express frustration about “empty promises” from ex-NFA – e.g. sewing machines and materials not delivered.</li> <li>•Desire for co-management: “NFA should work with us hand in hand.”</li> <li>•NFA should employ Batwa (e.g. as porters).</li> </ul>

- Historical claim; land issues persist: “It was our forest.”

#### Basic Needs

- Iron sheets, cooking utensils, mattresses, housing needed.
- Serious water shortages – the community lives on mountain tops.
- Lack of land forces reliance on forest resources.

#### Community structures and civil Society

- Savings group exists.
- Local NGOs mentioned: OBUDU, IACM, KADORA.
- Lack of awareness about Collaborative Forest Management (CFM) framework in place.

#### Priority needs and suggestions:

- Need for honey centrifuges.
- Community trained in handicrafts and agriculture.
- Sewing machines needed – youth currently have one; request for more.
- Youth also involved in making soap and pads, but they are limited by lack of materials.
- Potential for tree planting.
- Weaving materials (for bags) can be collected locally
- Requests for seeds (Irish, cabbage, peas, sorghum); tools (hoes); livestock (pigs and sheep -for manure)

## Annex III. Summary table of stakeholders consulted for VMGP development and revision

<b>Consultations for Echuya VMGP development and revision</b>	
<b>Batwa communities, VMGF Validation, 2020</b>	93 persons
<b>Batwa communities - Phase 1 – 2021</b>	15 persons
<b>Batwa communities - Phase 2 – 2022</b>	65 persons
<b>CSO/NGOs representatives (Phase 2) – 2022</b>	25 persons
<b>Batwa communities – Phase 3 (VMGP revision) – 2025</b>	217 persons
<b>CSO/ NGOs - VMGP revisión – 2025 Rubanda and Kisoro Districts</b>	11 organizations* (includes partner engagement in joint meetings that concerned Echuya, Mgahinga and Bwindi)
<b>Batwa communities – revised VMGP validation</b>	222 persons
<b>CSOs / NGOs – validation of revised VMGP – December 2025</b>	10 organizations** (includes partner engagement for Mgahinga, Bwindi and Echuya)

\* Batwa Development Organization, Batwa Indigenous Development Organization, Kisoro Concern for Marginalized People, United Organization for Batwa Development in Uganda, Bwindi Mgahinga Conservation Trust, Kisoro District Community-Based Development Organization, Nkuringo Community Development Foundation, Kisoro District NGO Forum, Kisoro Batwa Community Initiative, LOCAL KID NGO, Rushaga Batwa Cultural Resource.

\*\* Kisoro Concern for Marginalized, Batwa Development Organization, Stichting Kyakabi, Nkuringo Community Development Foundation, Kisoro Batwa Community Initiative, Bwindi Mgahinga Conservation Trust, Gorilla Organisation, Kisoro District NGO Forum, KADOLHA, UOBDU