



**Uganda Wildlife Authority
Institutional Assessment
*Summary***

January 2026

Uganda, a landlocked country in East Africa, is renowned for its biodiversity and protected areas (PAs), which are vital for wildlife conservation, ecosystem services, and tourism—a major contributor to the national economy. Iconic species such as mountain gorillas and elephants are found in parks like Bwindi Impenetrable National Park and Murchison Falls Conservation Area. However, Uganda faces persistent challenges in PA management, including poaching, illegal logging, land encroachment, and human-wildlife conflict (HWC). These issues are exacerbated by population growth, limited alternative livelihoods, and increasing demand for land and resources. The government and conservation organizations must balance wildlife and ecosystem conservation with local development needs.

Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) is an agency established under the Uganda Wildlife Act, responsible for conserving and managing wildlife in Uganda. The Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife, and Antiquities supervises UWA's operations and provides policy direction. UWA also works with civil society organisations and local communities through collaborative resource management, outreach, and revenue-sharing programs. UWA has placed community development at the forefront of its conservation strategy, investing significant effort in relationships with neighbouring communities. In conducting its law enforcement operations, UWA partners with the Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF), under the provisions of a memorandum of understanding. UWA works with the Uganda Police Force (UPF) within the UPF's mandate related to investigation of wildlife crimes; however, within PAs, UPF does not participate in regular patrols.

The institutional assessment was supported under the World Bank financed Investing in Forests and Protected Areas for Climate-Smart Development Project, which provides support to improved management of and increased benefits from ten protected areas managed by UWA in the Albertine Rift landscape. The IFPA-CD Project aims to strengthen Uganda's conservation capacity by providing limited support to improving law enforcement, addressing emerging threats (such as spread of invasive vegetation and HWC), and enhancing community engagement. The project integrates climate-smart development strategies to ensure the sustainability of natural resources.

The objective of the institutional assessment is to assess the capacity of UWA in four core areas: i) community outreach, ii) law enforcement, iii) incident management and iv) collaboration with other agencies, in particular with UPDF and UPF. The assessment combines review of internal governance documents, inter-service agreements and MoUs, discussions with key UWA staff, and multiple field visits to protected areas. These are analysed against relevant national legislation and international "good practice" to gauge UWA's ability, as a government-sanctioned entity, to operate to the standards it seeks to attain with regard to law enforcement. Particular attention is given to the frameworks and protocols governing Use of Force (UoF), human rights compliance and grievance handling, as well as the practical realities faced by rangers who are expected to conduct legal, ethical and safe operations.

Key recommendations resulting from the assessment include upgrading and completing existing and draft regulations, policies and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs); establishing and embedding human-rights requirements to achieve minimum internationally acceptable levels; reviewing and updating UoF (and de-escalation) and recruitment policies; and improving partner engagement and accountability mechanisms with UPDF and UPF. The assessment also highlights the need to modernise UWA's training system: overhauling the basic ranger curriculum, investing in a non-commissioned officer/mid level management staff (NCO) instructor cadre, and ensuring that improved tactics, techniques and procedures

reach patrol commanders in the protected areas, so that new recruits are not pulled back into outdated practices. Standardisation and upgrading of core equipment and welfare (so that rangers are provided with more than just a rifle and a phone) are essential signals that staff are valued and expected to meet professional standards.

The assessment also notes the importance of expanding UWA's own successful developments, including the UWA Digital Strategy, the UWA Academy and community conservation mechanisms, through which operational standards can be uplifted and sustained, and critical capacities such as Grievance Redress Mechanisms (GRM), incident management, ranger training and performance management can be strengthened. Whilst UWA's relationship with park-adjacent communities is central to long-term conservation success, the ongoing relationship with UPDF which are deeply involved in national security and border-area support to UWA, also remains critical. For this arrangement to work, memoranda of understanding covering command and control of joint operations, clear UoF and human-rights provisions, disciplinary lines and other "actions-on" must be robust and unambiguous.

UWA and partners must adhere to international legal frameworks and human rights law. Key benchmarks used for the institutional assessment included:

- **World Bank Environmental and Social Standard 4 *Community Health and Safety***: with regard to requirements for security personnel in Bank-financed projects.
- **International Committee of the Red Cross, International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), and United Nations**: with regard to international rules for policing, use of force, and human rights.
- **International Ranger Federation**: with regard to Ranger Code of Conduct and global competences.
- **IUCN**: with regard to best practices for wildlife law enforcement and ranger training.
- **International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime**: with regard to indicator framework for combating wildlife and forest crime.

During the review period, UWA was also merged with the Uganda Wildlife Education Centre under the guidance of the Public Service Office, adding an additional layer of institutional change that future support will need to take into account.

Recommendations

All specific recommendations (see Annex 1) were classified and prioritized into essential (E), important (I), desirable (D) or optional (O) categories.

Annex 1. Specific Recommendations				
#	Recommendation	Priority (E/I/D/O)	Rationale	Implement. Timeline
1	- Deliver scenario-based trauma refreshers for all patrol teams with clear pass/fail standards, same-week remediation and quarterly drills	E	Directly addresses current inability to manage life-threatening bleeds, chest wounds and snakebite; reduces avoidable fatalities in remote operations	6 months
2	- Issue a standard team trauma kit and maintain a sector CASEVAC pack (stretcher, extra dressings, splints, blankets)	E	Current kits are not fit for purpose; standard trauma load and CASEVAC pack are essential to make first-aid training effective in real incidents	6 months
3	- Vet and train first-aid instructors to train all Rangers in a remote-operations trauma curriculum in the Basic Ranger Course with annual recertification and centralised records	E	Ensures training is technically correct, repeatable and auditable; prevents a repeat of ineffective NGO/clinic trainings and embeds long-term competency	6 months
4	- Embed weapons-handling mastery in a dedicated NCO preparation package with complex scenario lanes (arrests, low-light, vehicles/rooms)	E	Current weapons safety and handling under stress are weak; poor muzzle discipline creates high risk of accidental shootings	6 months
5	- Strengthen field-level Arrest & Use-of-Force SOPs (sequencing, roles, cuff/search/caution, objective step-off and debrief checks)	E	Present arrest drills create high risk of unnecessary shootings and failed control; clear SOPs are a core legal and safety requirement <i>(SOP in Progress)</i>	2 months
6	-Introduce and integrate an organisation-wide Less-Than-Lethal (LTL) capability with policy, SOPs, operator/commander training and aftercare standards	E	Lack of LTL creates a proportionality gap in UoF, heightening legal exposure and community mistrust; LTL enables safer, rights-compliant interventions	12 months
7	- Provide (regular) NCO training in team management and supervision under stress (positioning, spacing, safety enforcement, post-incident control)	E	Patrol leaders are not consistently correcting unsafe practices; strengthening NCO leadership reduces tactical errors and dynamic safety failures	6 months
8	- Develop and implement field communications SOPs (lost-communications drills, standard report	I	Intra-team communications are inconsistent; structured radio procedures improve coordination,	2 months

	formats, radio-check schedule, simple call-sign/frequency plan)		reduce confusion and support incident response	
9	-Standardise minimum field kit with packing lists, pre-step-off inspections, and upgrade legacy items (handcuffs, rifles, webbing) with maintenance schedules and to include adequate first aid kits and safeguarding kits	I	Current kit is uneven and sometimes unsafe (poor restraints, unsuitable webbing); standardisation improves readiness, safety and evidence handling	12 months
10	- Move to modular belt-order with patrol pack and allocate suitable larger-calibre weapons (.308/7.62x51) for designated dangerous-game protection roles	D	Optimises carriage of essential load and improves dangerous-game deterrence, but can follow once core safety and training gaps are addressed	6 months
11	-Incorporate basic night operations equipment for all law enforcement teams conducting static night operations (NIR or LWIR Electro Optic per team), and night patrol equipment for minimum 1 team per protected area with accompanying training (1x NIR Electro Optic per patrol member, 1 LWIR Thermal per team, Night aiming device or night capable optic per patrol member)	E	Currently UWA officers are unable to effectively operate by night. They do not have the capability to make positive identification or actively employ their firearms in self-defence against militant threats or dangerous game.	6 Months
12	-Train and equip a 6-man team per protected area in active night operations with essential equipment including NIR and LWIR night vision, mounts, firearm optics and identification systems	I	Currently QRF teams are unable to effectively deploy by night without overt methods and white light. This is a considerable gap in capability, particularly as most HWC and poaching activities reportedly take place at night.	9 months
13	- Develop and Implement Joint Operations and Command Center (JOC) watchkeeper SOPs with incident grades, decision thresholds, pre-authorized actions, event checklists, notification matrix and quarterly drills	I	Without clear grading and delegations, decisions default upwards and delay CASEVAC and QRF activation; SOPs improve response speed and coordination <i>(SOP under development)</i>	6 Months
14	- Establish dedicated, trained Quick Reaction Forces (QRFs) with their own vehicles, trauma kit, stretcher,	I	Current QRF capability is uneven; a standardised QRF model improves response to serious incidents and	12 months

	communications and joint JOC–QRF SOPs in priority PAs		supports ranger confidence in escalation pathways	
15	Adopt an annual training plan with quarterly refreshers (first aid, arrest/search/UoF, communications, navigation, evidence handling) and tracked attendance/remediation	I	Training is currently ad hoc and under-managed; a structured plan sustains skills, links drills to recent incidents and allows management oversight	6 months
16	Create shared UWA–NFA MoU/permit registers, joint pre-patrol briefs in overlap dual-management areas (UWA-NFA) and patrol pocket cards on valid agreements	I	Local misalignment on community MoUs/permits causes frontline disputes and legal risk; shared tools reduce friction and wrongful enforcement	6 months
17	Deliver community education on lawful patrolling and conservation law-enforcement, with plain-language “What to Expect on Patrol” notices and GRM contacts	I	Community members should have good understanding of what constitutes legal and illegal practices within PAs and what UWA’s staff are legally permitted to do to address illegalities (powers of arrest, powers of seizure, etc.) Community knowledge gaps increase the risk of misunderstanding and exploitation; clear information builds trust and improves grievance pathways	6 months
18	Process and access in communities surrounding the protected areas with submission boxes in all PAs and clear responsibility lines and hierarchy.	E	Strengthened GRM will increase trust and cooperation between UWA and community groups, allowing more sensitive grievances to be dealt with privately and securely.	6 months
19	Implementation of organisation-wide OH&S policy and functional mechanism for catching, investigating and rectifying workplace hazards.	E	Establishing a functional OH&S mechanism will greatly improve workplace safety and trust, while ensuring near-miss and dangerous occurrences are captured and rectified before escalating to casualties or fatalities. <i>(SOP under development)</i>	2 months
20	Develop and train a Warning-Shot SOP (authorisation, safe backstops, communication sequence, post-shot control and reporting)	E	Current practice is uncontrolled; a formal SOP reduces the risk of injury from warning shots and clarifies accountability	2 months

			<i>(SOP under development)</i>	
21	Issue a joint UWA–UPDF directive/annex clarifying roles, UoF alignment, incident command, custody/evidence handover, CASEVAC responsibilities and reporting	I	Ambiguous MoU language and unauthorized joint patrols blur accountability and increase safety/legal risk; clarification is critical for partnered operations	6 months
22	Establish a formal NCO development program aligned to UWA SOPs (weapons safety, arrest/UoF leadership, communications discipline, OH&S/CASEVAC, after-action reviews) with certification and recertification	I	There is no standard leadership pipeline; a structured NCO program underpins all tactical improvements and ensures leadership quality over time	12 months
23	Develop and implement a law-enforcement Code of Conduct aligned with the IRF to improve behavioural consistency across PAs and provide a clear, fair basis for supervision and discipline.	I	Ensures ranger behaviour is guided by clear, written standards rather than personality or local culture <i>(SOP under development)</i>	6 months
24	UWA and UPDF should jointly review and amend the 2025 Operational Agreement to: (i) replace outdated warning-shot and “shoot to disable” provisions with a modern, risk-based use-of-force framework and detailed warning-shot SOPs (safe backstops, authorisation, reporting); (ii) include provisions for feedback on disciplinary outcomes for UPDF personnel operating in support of UWA; and (iii) develop and annex a standard onboarding curriculum for all attached UPDF personnel covering practical scenario based training for de-escalation, human rights, UoF, Code of Ethical Conduct, emergency protocols and community engagement, with completion and competence made a prerequisite for deployment on UWA operations.	I	Ensures joint operations with UPDF are governed by safe, modern and legally robust use-of-force standards, while guaranteeing that all attached soldiers are properly trained, briefed and certified before deployment, reducing the risk of unlawful shootings, inconsistent practice and community mistrust.	6 months