

UGANDA

Indigenous peoples in Uganda include the traditional hunter/gatherer Batwa, also known as Twa and Benet communities, pastoralist groups such as the Karamojong and the Ik. They are not recognized as indigenous by the government.

The Karamojong are transhumant pastoralists who live in the neglected Karamoja region of north-eastern Uganda. They number around 955,245¹ people, out of a total population of approximately 26 million in Uganda. The Benet, who number around 20,000 people, also live in the north-eastern part of the country. They are former hunter/gatherers. The 6,700 or so Batwa who live primarily in the south-western region of Uganda are also former hunter/gatherers. They were dispossessed of their ancestral land when the Bwindi and Mgahinga forests were gazetted as national parks in 1991.² The Ik are a marginalized and isolated agricultural people, numbering approximately 12,000 people, who live exclusively in the Kaabong District in the northern part of Uganda.

The Constitution has no express protection for indigenous peoples but provides for affirmative action in favour of marginalized groups. The Land Act of 1998 and the National Environment Statute of 1995 protect customary interests in land and traditional uses of forests. However these laws also authorize the government to exclude human activities in any forest area by declaring it a protected forest, thus nullifying the customary land rights of indigenous peoples.³

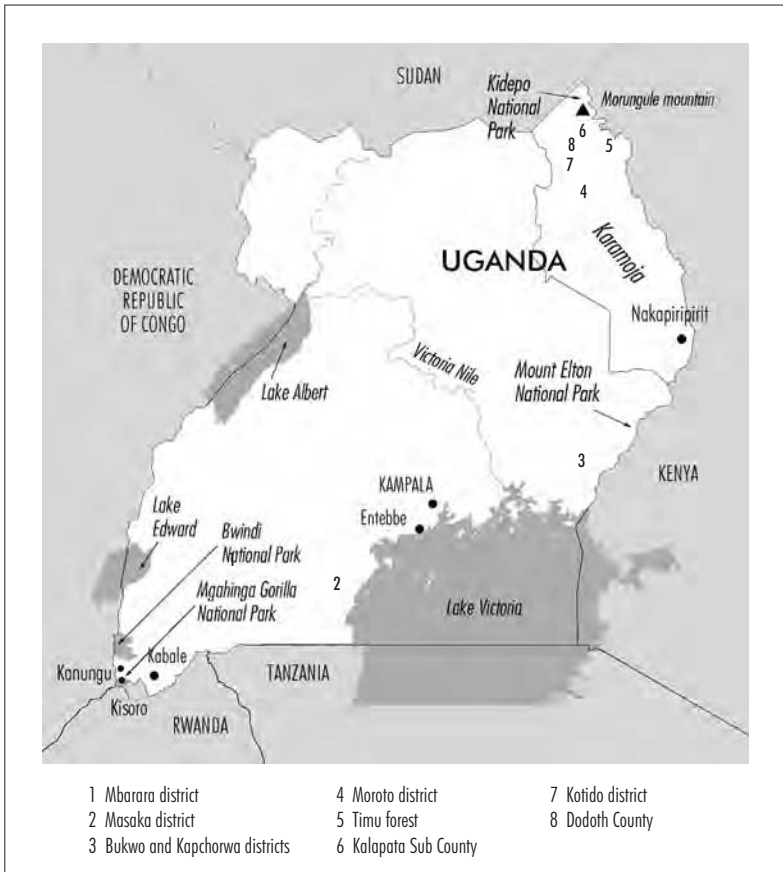
Main issues for the Batwa

The Batwa are the indigenous people of the south-west of Uganda and they formerly inhabited the mountainous forests where the

last remaining mountain gorillas are found. Successive conservation efforts over the years have marginalised the Batwa from their ancestral forests and now the Batwa live outside the forest as squatters on neighbouring land. No free, prior and informed consent was ever given by the Batwa to these conservation efforts and no compensation was received. A recent report by the Forest Peoples Programme (FPP), a UK based NGO, and the Batwa's own representative organisation, the United Organisation for Batwa Development in Uganda (UOBDU), highlighted the fact that, 17 years after the creation of these forests as national parks, the Batwa still have no involvement in the planning and management of these protected areas and receive little or no benefits.⁴ The Batwa are one of Uganda's smallest minorities and suffer extreme marginalisation, discrimination and violence against them.

Despite this, the Batwa's own organisation, UOBDU, has been continuing to fight for the rights of the Batwa locally, nationally and internationally. In 2008, with the support of various organisations, UOBDU provided support to its members through education and income generation, and pursued negotiations with local and central government. With external assistance, UOBDU provided agricultural support to six communities in Kisoro District through the provision of land, tools and seeds, and goats to a further three communities. 2008 also saw the completion of a housing project that built semi-permanent structures for eight families, as well as the completion of a management plan for land purchased in 2007.

Education has been a key area in 2008 and 10 Batwa have been supported to undergo leadership training and functional adult literacy (FAL) in both English and local languages. UOBDU received support for an extensive education programme that provides assistance to 40 children in primary schools and 15 students in secondary schools. Despite the existence of Universal Primary Education (UPE) and Universal Secondary Education (USE) in Uganda, many Batwa children are not able to access education because they lack the funds needed to provide scholastic materials, uniforms and food. UOBDU's support to education aims to provide these supplementary items so that the students can achieve a successful education. Additionally, UOBDU's education programme is carrying out FAL in 15 communities, reaching



over 300 individuals and providing support to over 30 adults to receive training in carpentry, tailoring and mechanics.

The Batwa were supported by UOBDU and FPP through increased negotiations with local and central government and lobbying at local, national and international level. Despite land donated by various groups since 2000, up to 45% of Batwa continue to be landless and live as squatters on their neighbours' lands. As a result, land has continued to be the main focus of all advocacy strategies as well as lobbying in the areas of protected area management, health, education and livelihoods. Representatives of the Batwa again visited the African Com-

mission on Human and Peoples' Rights in 2008 and, in September, they were present at the World Parks Congress in Barcelona to highlight their lack of participation in protected area management.

In February 2008, the respective ministers from Uganda, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo signed an agreement to create a transboundary biosphere out of the national parks that cover the Virunga landscape in the three countries. Once again this decision was made without the free, prior and informed consent of indigenous Batwa communities. As a result, indigenous organisations in the three countries, including UOBDU, prepared and delivered a letter to each of these ministers asking for this initiative to respect and safeguard the internationally accepted rights of indigenous people to their ancestral lands. No response was received.

In 2008, UOBDU extended its support to Batwa communities in Masaka and Mbarara districts and it hopes to continue to grow in 2009. Despite an increase in work on the part of both UOBDU and its partners, the Batwa are still one of the most marginalised and vulnerable communities in Uganda and their rights are denied at almost every opportunity. In 2009, the Batwa will continue to place pressure upon the government of Uganda and the international community to redress past wrongs in order to enforce their full rights as citizens of Uganda.

Main issues for the Benet

The Benet are a former hunter/gatherer group who live on the western side of Mt. Elgon in Uganda. Over the years, the Benet have been marginalised from their ancestral lands through conservation initiatives and were resettled in 1983 outside of Mt. Elgon Forest Reserve, which later became Mt. Elgon National Park. In 2005 the Benet and their supporters won a landmark case to have their lands within Mt. Elgon National Park returned to them. Additionally, the court ruling also demanded that the government of Uganda provide social services in lieu of the damages the Benet had suffered due to their marginalisation over the years from government policies and services.

Despite this success, the Benet have struggled to get the ruling implemented by the government. In 2008, some progress was made and

the Benet communities in Bukwo District have now been permanently resettled. In addition, approximately 1,000 Benet from Kapchorwa District, which the government had until now failed to recognise, have now been acknowledged and temporarily resettled ahead of a more permanent solution.

In 2009, the Benet, led by their representative organisation, the Benet Lobby Group, aim to continue to put pressure on the government to honour the court ruling, first by securing permanent land for all Benet and, secondly, by securing the affirmative action, in the form of social services, that they desperately need.

Main issues for the Ik

The Ik are an indigenous people who were referred to as the “mountain people” in Colin Turnbull’s controversial study of them.⁵ They are an agricultural people who live exclusively in the northern part of Kaabong District, in Dodoth County, Kalapata and Kathile Sub Counties. Their communities are located on top of a remote mountain escarpment along the Kenyan border ranging from Timu Forest in the south to Kidepo National Park in the north. They are bordered to the north by the Didinga and Toposa of Sudan, to the west and south by the Dodoth (an ethnic subgroup of the Karamojong), and to the east by the Turkana of Kenya.⁶

As a result of their location in relation to their neighbours, the Ik are incredibly vulnerable and liable to attacks from both Dodoth and Turkana warriors. They are historically a non-violent people and, as a result, they have become what one report has described as “the archetypal middlemen – unarmed, non-combative and numerically weak”. The Ik exist in a precarious situation on the top of the escarpments and whilst their physical isolation in the mountains helps to protect them from violence at the hands of raiding warriors, it also serves to marginalise them from government services. Additionally, due to periodic drought, the Ik often face famine. The vital relief aid that has targeted the region has often not reached them.

In 2008, the Ik communities living on Mt. Morungole, near Kidepo National Park, were visited by a representative of the Forest Peoples

Programme, a charity that supports forest peoples' rights. These communities explained that their problems mainly arise, both directly and indirectly, from the activities of the Dodoth warriors. They directly suffer when they are attacked and their crops are stolen, and indirectly when services are unable to reach them due to the persistent insecurity.

They are aware of "developments" (services such as health care, education, agricultural support, etc.) being implemented in the rest of their region, and can identify the many NGO and government projects located in the valleys. They wish that their children could access these services in order to successfully negotiate their future; however, they explained that none of these "developments" has ever targeted them in their locations. Instead, development is focused in the valleys, amongst the Dodoth and, as a result, the Ik feel isolated, marginalised and left out of the plans of government and civil society.

Although the Ik are politically represented in their local communities, their concerns are rarely dealt with. Additionally, when the LCI and the Parish Chief of Mt. Morungole travel to the sub-county offices, they are often pressurised into moving their people down from the mountains to resettle closer to government services in the valley. It has become a clear worry amongst the Ik communities that one day they will be forced by the government to abandon their ancestral areas in the mountains and move down to the valley where they fear they will become completely vulnerable to their more dominant neighbours.

The Ik that have been consulted want schools, health centres and basic services delivered to their current locations, where they can better access them. They urgently need programmes specifically tailored to their communities, from organisations that are committed to providing long-term support. □

Notes

- 1 According to the final results of the September 2002 National Population and Housing Census, Kotido District has a population of 605,322 (302,206 males and 303,116 females). Moroto District has a population of 194,773 (98,145 males and 96,628 females). Nakapiripirit has a population of 155,150 (78,284 males and 76,866 females) (See <http://www.ubos.org/preliminaryfullreport.pdf>).

- 2 **United Organisation of Batwa Development in Uganda (UOBDU), 2004:** *Report about Batwa data*. August 2004, Uganda, p.3.
- 3 Land Act (1998), Articles 2 and 44; National Environment Statute (1995), Article 46.
- 4 See **Kidd, Christopher and Zaninka, Penninah, 2008:** *Securing Indigenous Peoples' Rights in Conservation: A review of south-west Uganda*. Forest Peoples Programme, Moreton-in-Marsh
- 5 See **Turnbull, Colin M., 1972:** *The Mountain People*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- 6 **Wiedemann, Sabine and Nannyombi, Prossy, 2007:** *Ik Language Assessment Report*, SIL International.

Moses Mwangi is the chairperson, and David Mukhwana a paralegal support worker for the Benet Lobby Group. The BLG is a representative organisation of the Benet people and has fought for their rights for the last 37 years. In 2009 it will continue work to ensure that the agreements from their court case against the government of Uganda are honoured. benetlobbygroup@yahoo.com. Penninah Zaninka works for the United Organisation for Batwa Development in Uganda, the representative organisation of the Batwa in south-west Uganda. Since 2000 this organisation has been working to support its members in the districts of Kisoro, Kabale and Kanungu. zaninkah@yahoo.com. Chris Kidd is an anthropologist working for the Forest Peoples Programme, a charity that supports the rights of forest peoples internationally. Chris previously completed his PhD thesis on the effects of conservation and development initiatives on the life projects of the Batwa in Uganda. chris@forestpeoples.org